Julia Annas

ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

A Very Short Introduction

SECOND EDITION

OXFORD

Ancient Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction

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ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

A Very Short Introduction

SECOND EDITION

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Preface

The prospect of writing a *very* short introduction to ancient philosophy has attracted and intrigued me for some time. I would like to thank Shelley Cox for her encouragement and comments, as well as Christopher Gill, Laura Owen, David Owen, and a reader for Oxford University Press. I would like to thank Cindy Holder for help with the proofs and index. Needless to say, the shortcomings rest with me. I would like to dedicate this book to the memory of my friend Jean Hampton, who I hope would have enjoyed it.

Preface to second edition

Returning to this book after several years, I've been given the chance to improve it. I have brought it up to date at several points, rearranged material, omitting material that is now of less interest, and generally aimed to refresh the presentation. The basic approach remains the same: ancient philosophy is best introduced as philosophy, rather than as a parade of ideas. I hope that I've succeeded.

A very short introduction should have modest aims. It is also, however, an opportunity to give readers direct ways into the subject, and lead them straight off to what is most important about the subject. I've tried to get the reader engaged with ancient

philosophy in the way that matters, as a tradition of discussion and conversation, conversation which I hope will continue after the reader has finished this book.

Because I have focused on outstanding and revealing features of ancient philosophy, I have not tried to follow a standard chronological account of the tradition. Not only does the *very* short nature of this book make that a bad idea (since the tradition is too rich to cram into a very short account), but there is no shortage of books available that will help the beginner deepen their interest in ancient philosophy. The list of Further reading indicates good places to start; beginners have never been better served with reference books, translations, and companions than they are today.

I will be introducing ancient philosophy not by introducing philosophers individually and indicating their 'greatest philosophical hits', but by introducing us into the conversations that philosophers in the ancient Graeco-Roman world had with one another, and with people outside philosophical traditions. These are conversations about how best to live our lives, how to think about the kind of beings we are, how to reason well, how to assess what we know, and, ultimately, how to understand the world that we all live in. These are conversations that we get drawn into from our everyday lives. Philosophy takes them up, and as we engage with the questions, answers, and reasoning that develop, we find that we're thinking about our own issues in a deeper and more complex way.

Contents

List of illustrations

Who are we discussing? A brief chronological sketch

If you are new to the subject you may appreciate a quick chronological sketch of the tradition you are being introduced to, so one follows. There is also a timeline placing the major figures in ancient philosophy, not all of whom can be adequately dealt with in this book, though many are discussed in the text and the text-boxes. (Within their home city a Greek was known by their own name, that of their father, and sometimes their district; further afield they were known by their name and that of their home city.)

Ancient philosophy is traditionally held to begin in the 6th century BCE, in the Greek cities of coastal Asia Minor (modern Turkey). A large number of philosophers are generally grouped as 'Presocratics'; their activities cover the 6th and 5th centuries. Of these, Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, from Miletus, present rational accounts of the universe, in terms of a small number of explanatory principles. Pythagoras of Samos began a very different tradition, one emphasizing mysticism and authority, and also mathematics as a basic explanatory feature of the world. The Pythagorean tradition developed in two ways: as an exploration of mathematics and music, and as a secretive cult. Heraclitus of Ephesus also produced an account of the world as a whole in notoriously obscure aphorisms which relate the self to the world. Xenophanes of Colophon begins a long concern with knowledge

and its grounds, urging us to reflect on the basis of our claims about many things, including the gods.

Parmenides and Zeno of Elea became famous for arguments which apparently cannot be refuted, but which reach conclusions impossible to accept. Given Parmenides' argument, the results of our senses cannot be accepted, and we are left apparently stranded by using our reasoning. Zeno's notorious paradoxes leave us in the same state. These arguments provoked a crisis in philosophical accounts of the world. Philosophers now had to become more sophisticated in responding to Parmenides, beginning an overt distinction between the world of our experience and the world revealed by philosophical argument. We can see this in the cosmologies of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, Empedocles of Acragas, and the Atomists Leucippus and Democritus of Abdera.

In the second half of the 5th century, intellectuals called sophists developed some philosophical skills, particularly in argument, and philosophical interests, particularly in ethical and social thought. The best known are Protagoras of Abdera, Hippias of Elis, Gorgias of Leontini, and Prodicus of Cos.

Some of these people are not strictly *Pre*socratics, since their lives overlapped with that of Socrates of Athens, but Socrates is generally held to mark a turning point in ancient philosophy. He wrote nothing but greatly influenced a number of followers, including Aristippus of Cyrene (a founder of hedonism, the idea that our aim should be pleasure) and Antisthenes of Athens (a founder of Cynicism, the idea that our needs should be as minimal as possible). Socrates' emphasis on questioning and argument made him the key symbolic figure of the Philosopher to the ancient world. He was, at the end of his life, executed by his fellow Athenians on the grounds of 'corrupting the young' and not believing in the gods; this made him the symbolic figure of

philosophy as misunderstood and persecuted by political forces, something which has had resonance in many places and at many times.

Socrates' most famous follower is Plato of Athens, the best-known ancient philosopher, who wrote a number of philosophical dialogues famous for their literary skill. Plato founded the first philosophical school, the Academy. At this point philosophy comes to focus on Athens rather than being spread over the large number of cities just mentioned; and it comes to be done in philosophical schools. These are loose associations of people discussing together rather than formal structures like modern universities, but they produce schools of thought: if you attend Plato's school, the Academy, you are identifying as an Academic, and from now on it is schools which debate more than individuals. Plato's most famous follower and student, Aristotle of Stagira, founded his own school, the Lyceum, in Athens after Plato's death. Plato and Aristotle tend to dominate our accounts of ancient philosophy because we have extensive work from both of them, Plato in finished form, Aristotle in the form of lecture and research notes. With some philosophers after Aristotle we are not so lucky and have to rely on reports of their ideas; this is true of the 'Hellenistic' period.

This period (traditionally from 323 BCE, the death of Alexander the Great, to the end of the Roman republic at the end of the 1st century BCE) is marked by the emergence of two new philosophical schools, those of Epicurus and of the Stoics, and also of philosophical movements which were not institutionalized as schools, such as the Cynics, who practised 'street philosophy', and rejected many basic social conventions, and also Pyrrho, the first sceptic. Plato's school practised a different, 'Academic' form of scepticism in this period. As this period drew to an end, some philosophers chose to synthesize thoughts from different schools rather than continue familiar debates.

During the 1st century BCE to the 2nd century CE, the early Roman empire, the existing schools continue, and philosophy flourishes in a variety of places, with Athens no longer its centre. There is renewed interest in Pythagoras, and a new interest in Plato emerges, thinking of Plato's ideas positively as a system of 'Platonism', rather than as dialogues inviting engagement. Commentaries on Plato emerge, as engaging with texts becomes a new way of doing philosophy.

Late antiquity sees the emergence, in the 2nd to 3rd centuries, of an original new school, that of Plotinus, which identifies itself as Platonist, but goes beyond systematizing Plato's ideas and creates an original way of thinking about the world and ourselves; it is often called 'Neoplatonism'. We have Plotinus' works whole, together with those of later Neoplatonists, and commentaries on Plato and Aristotle. We also have extensive works which relate themselves to earlier philosophers, such as Sextus Empiricus' revived Pyrrhonist scepticism, and very lengthy works by Galen, a doctor with philosophical interests.

The major western Christian thinker Augustine is influenced by later Platonism, but, being unable to read philosophical works in the original Greek, has lost direct touch with the original arguments. The language of ancient philosophy had originally been Greek, and this continued into the Roman period, although a few Roman philosophers, such as Cicero and Seneca, chose to write philosophically in Latin. Greek Christian philosophers in the eastern empire never lost continuity with ancient culture, including philosophy, but in the western empire there was severe loss of ancient traditions until the 'Middle Ages'.

Chapter 1
How to be happy

You need to choose

The Choice of Heracles (the Roman Hercules) was familiar and widely spread in ancient Greek and Roman culture. We first find the story in Xenophon of Athens, an acquaintance of Socrates who wrote accounts of conversations with him. Xenophon ascribes the story to Prodicus of Cos, a so-called 'sophist' of the 5th century. It becomes a familiar point of reference in ethical discussions.

As Xenophon tells it, Socrates is talking to a friend, Aristippus, who believes in going for what you want when you want it. Deferring your gratifications is a silly policy—if you want it now, get it now! Socrates objects that as a policy this may be dangerous. If you are unable to control your desires you may end up at the mercy of people who can, and who use the self-mastery that they have, and you don't, to compete with you successfully and eventually to gain control over your life. Aristippus, though, doubts this. He can, he says, lead a life which is devoted to self-gratification and yet manage to avoid being dominated by others. This is the way to happiness, he insists.

Socrates still disagrees. It isn't, he thinks, just a matter of evading what others can do to you. It's a matter of how you regard your own life. To make the point he tells Prodicus' story. The divine

hero Heracles, at the start of his adult life, came to a crossroads. Two women came along, each urging him to take one of the opposing ways. One was self-consciously fashionable, bold, and made up; she urged him to take the easy road of satisfying desires and going through life doing what he wanted, deliberating only as to how to do so with least effort. My friends, she said, call me Happiness, though my enemies call me Vice. The other woman, solemn and modest in manner, appealed by her words rather than her manner, and urged him to follow her, Virtue, even though her way was one of effort and frequent frustration rather than easy success. What I offer, she said, is worthwhile but requires work and self-denial; vice offers an easy road to happiness, but the initial appeal fades and leaves you with nothing worth having. Virtue, though, is the way to achievement and respect, which forms real happiness.

The Choice of Heracles forms a frequent subject in Western art. The version illustrated in Figure 1 by Paolo de Matteis was commissioned in 1712 by the philosopher Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, to provide an illustration for his own book on virtue. It and many similar depictions reinforce something about the telling of the story that makes modern readers uncomfortable: ethical choice is depicted as two females competing for a man. Moreover, even though one point is that what matters is the reality of happiness, not its mere appearance, this point is itself depicted by the competing attractions of the two females, one being, on due consideration, more attractive than the other—an obviously sexist choice of metaphor.

But apart from this, we may feel puzzled as to why this story should be famous. The point it makes seems extremely obvious without a story. Clearly, we may think, if you are asked to choose between virtue and vice, you should choose virtue, but that's the easy part; the hard part is working out what virtue is, and how to achieve it. If we think this, it is probably because the ancient ethical framework may be unfamiliar. But it is now becoming ever

The sophists

'Sophists' is the term used for a number of intellectuals in the 5th century BCE who, while they did not form a unified intellectual tradition, represented a new departure. They travelled around various cities, teaching for money a variety of intellectual skills, the most saleable being skills in rhetoric and argument which would give the learner an advantage in public life. Although some of their concerns fit into the philosophical tradition, they have remained on its edge because Plato immortalized them in many of his dialogues as pompous, incompetent fools, a foil to his own hero Socrates. Plato's depiction is gleefully unfair, but we lack enough independent evidence to counter it in any detail.

The most famous sophists were Hippias of Elis, Prodicus of Cos, Thrasymachus of Chalcedon, and Protagoras of Abdera. Hippias was famous for the large number of his accomplishments and Prodicus for his study of language. Thrasymachus is portrayed in the *Republic* as holding an account of justice which aggressively reduces it to the interest of the stronger. Protagoras is the only one who held an important philosophical thesis, namely relativism, the view that for a belief to be true is just for it to appear true to the person who holds it. Plato refutes this view in his dialogue *Theaetetus* (see p. 61 below).

Plato despises the sophists for many reasons. He rejects their views, particularly relativism, and he thinks that teaching intellectual skills for money debases these by turning them into commodities, valued for what they do for you rather than respected for their own sake. He also thinks that, just because they do not take it seriously, the sophists are in fact incompetent at philosophical argument. In his presentation of them, of course, they certainly are.



1. Heracles deciding between austere Virtue and tempting Pleasure.

more accessible, as virtue becomes more familiar in both philosophy and ordinary discourse. We are now, it turns out, in quite a good position to appreciate the claims of Virtue on Heracles.

Virtue and Vice are offering Heracles differing roads to happiness. Prodicus was one of the first thinkers to make something important explicit; we are all, in our lives, aiming at happiness. We find this thought also in the philosophers Democritus and Plato. Indeed, Plato stresses that it would be ludicrous to deny that happiness is our overall goal in life, the destination on everyone's road.

But Prodicus also made a mark by emphasizing something else. When you are starting out on adult life, aiming at happiness, and doing so consciously, you will be faced with a *choice*. You can't have it all. *You need to choose*. You can't go through life gratifying your desires and still hope to achieve anything worthwhile, or to live a life that you or others can respect.

Recognizing explicitly that your aim in life is happiness brings with it the realization that you have to reflect on and order your life in one way rather than another. Life presents you with the alternatives; you have to make the decisions. Centuries later Cicero, a Roman politician and sophisticated intellectual, still thought that the story said something profound about everybody's life and their attitude to it. You can't have everything you want in life, because some options exclude others, and when you are young the choices you make affect all of your life afterwards. Of course it is young people, for whom this point is most important, who are the least likely to welcome awareness of it. Presumably that is why the story features a divine hero.

Happiness and pleasure

Vice doesn't offer Heracles success in battle or riches by devious means. She offers him the pleasures of food, drink, and sex,

pooh-poohing any need for self-control and stressing what a pleasant and easy life she offers. Virtue stresses goals that are long term and require self-control and respect for what is good and worthwhile. In most versions of the story Virtue's opponent is simply called Pleasure.

In our traditions of moral philosophy it may seem strange that pleasure is the bad, rejected way of getting happiness. John Stuart Mill, a major founder of the Utilitarian tradition, actually defines happiness as pleasure and the absence of pain. Doing the right thing, he claims, is doing what will produce most pleasure and least pain.

Even if we do not see happiness as actually constituted by pleasure it still seems somewhat odd to see happiness as achieved by virtue *as opposed to* pleasure. Here we can see that ancient ethical thought gives a different, distinctive role to happiness in ethical thinking.

Happiness in ancient ethical thinking is not a matter of feeling good or being pleased; it is not a feeling or emotion at all. It is your life as a whole which is said to be happy or not, and so discussions of happiness are discussions of the happy life. It is unfortunate that what we call happy are not just lives but also moments and fleeting experiences. Modern discussions of happiness tend to get confused because such different things are being considered as though they could all be happy in the same way. In ancient ethics happiness enters ethical discussion by a very different route from the common one that happiness is 'feeling good' about your life.

Sometimes you step back from your routines of daily life and think about your life as a whole. You may be forced to do this by a crisis, or it might be that passing a stage in your life, such as leaving adolescence—as in the Heracles story—makes you think about what you are doing in your life overall, what your values are, and

what matters most to you. For the ancients this is the beginning of ethical thinking, the entry point for ethical reflection. When you realize this, you have to face choices, and deal with the fact that certain values, and courses of action, exclude others. You have to ask how all your concerns fit together, or fail to fit. What you are looking for, all ancient thinkers assume, is how to make sense of your life as a whole, by bringing your concerns under the heading of your final aim or goal, your *telos*. For someone who fails to unify her concerns in any overall way is radically in denial about the way all her projects are hers, fit together in *her* life. This point is in the background when we think about our lives—because I have only one life to live, the way I live it is something I should care about and think carefully about.

What can you say about the way your life is tending, the values you are expressing in your life? At first, probably not much. It is only after thinking about ethics, and thinking through some ethical theories, that you will have much of an explicit idea as to which values are unifying your life. In the ancient world, before even getting on to theory, there is one thing you realize: as is most famously set forth by Aristotle, everyone agrees that their final end is happiness, and that what people seek in everything they do is to live a happy life. Hence ancient ethical theories are called *eudaimonist*, from *eudaimonia*, the Greek for happiness.

Why is this supposed to be so obvious? It would not be obvious at all if happiness were introduced via the notion of pleasure or feeling good. But when we think about happiness we see that there are conditions it has to meet, certain demands before we can even start asking what its content is. Any candidate for being the content—virtue, pleasure, or whatever—has to meet these demands. The overall end which unifies all your concerns has to be *complete*: everything you do, or go for, is sought for the sake of it, while it is not sought for the sake of anything further. It also has to be *self-sufficient*: it does not leave out any element in your life that has value as part of living well. These are commonsense

points, though they have powerful implications. And on the level of common sense, happiness is the only plausible aim in your life as a whole which is complete and self-sufficient. We do other things in order to be happy, but it makes no sense to be happy for some further reason. And once we are living happily we lack nothing further to be living well. These points are obvious with the ancient conception of happiness. But, as Aristotle immediately points out, they do not settle very much, for great disagreement remains as to how happiness should be specified, and the different schools of thought about ethics take off from here.

One point is clear right from the start, however. Happiness is having a happy life—it applies to your life overall. Pleasure, however, is more naturally taken to be something episodic, something you can feel now and not later. It is something you experience as you perform the activities which make up your life. You can be enjoying a meal, a conversation, even life one moment and not the next; but you cannot, in the ancient way of thinking, be happy one moment and not the next, since happiness applies to your life as a whole.

Hence we can see why Pleasure's role in the Choice of Heracles is to provide an obviously faulty road to happiness. Pleasure fixes us on the here and now, the present desire which demands to be satisfied; and this gets in the way of the self-control and rational overall reflection which is required by a life devoted to things that are worthwhile. Pleasure is short term, while happiness is long term. So, in complete opposition to the contemporary way of looking at the matter, it looks as though pleasure is not even in the running to be a candidate for happiness. How could your life as a whole be focused on a short-term reward like pleasure? Someone who does this is making a big mistake, giving in to the present satisfaction at the cost of a proper concern for the rest of her life.

In fact *hedonism*, the view that pleasure is our ethical end, is always on the defensive in ancient ethics. Opponents like to

make it appear as though this is because there is something inherently unworthy and degrading about humans going for pleasure, but this is mostly edifying rhetoric. The problem is rather that pleasure is defective as an aim that could structure a person's entire life. We can see this in the two major hedonist theories.

Pleasure as be-all and end-all: the Cyrenaics

Aristippus, a student of Socrates, founded a school called Cyrenaics after his home at Cyrene in North Africa. It was not a very unified school, but they all held that our final end—namely what we seek in everything we do—is pleasure, and by pleasure they uncompromisingly meant what we experience when we enjoy or feel good about some experience. Pleasure is a movement, not a settled state (and so is pain). Pleasures do not differ from one another, and one pleasure is not more pleasant than another; that is, pleasure is taken to be a single kind of experience which is always the same whatever the circumstances which produce it. We have access to pleasure only by our direct experience of it, and we have knowledge only of our experiences, not of the objects which produce them. Hence past pleasures, which have vanished, and future pleasures, which are still to come, cannot be compared with the present pleasure which we experience, and the Cyrenaics sometimes speak as though only the present exists. Certainly the present is all that matters, and our lives should be so shaped as to get present pleasure.

If all that matters is to get present pleasure, what has happened to happiness? Alone among ancient philosophers, some of the Cyrenaics say that we should not think of it as what we are seeking in everything we do. A happy life is an organized one in which past and future pleasures count in relation to present ones, but if our concern should always be to pursue the present pleasure then happiness will sometimes get in the way of this, and so cannot always be our ultimate end.

Kinds of hedonism

Aristippus of Cyrene in North Africa (*c*.435–355 BCE) went to Athens and was an associate of Socrates. Evidence about his life is unreliable, consisting mainly of anecdotes showing him living a colourful life devoted to gratification, with no care for his dignity or for other people. However, he cared enough about his daughter, Arete, to teach her his ideas. She in turn taught her son Aristippus the Younger, and either or both of them may be the source of the systematic philosophy attributed to the school of Cyrene.

Epicurus of Athens (341–270 BCE) developed his own version of hedonism in a way that he represented as self-taught, although he did have some philosophical education.

Around 307 he set up a philosophical school in Athens. Unlike the schools of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, it was not one which met in a public place and in which teaching prominently included argument and debate. Epicurus' school was called the Garden after its home, and his teaching put a premium on learning and memorizing the words of Epicurus and other founding members. Discussion took place orally and in writing throughout the school's history, but Epicureans regarded Epicurus as a saviour from unhappiness, and a shining light, in a way that philosophers from other schools found too deferential. Epicurus' main contribution was his hedonistic ethics; in his philosophy of nature he took over the views of the earlier Atomist Democritus, developing a world-view in which, unusually in ancient philosophy, there is no room for providence or teleology of any kind, and the gods, though they exist, take no interest in human beings.

Always seeking the greatest present pleasure might sound like a suicidal strategy for living your life, one that is bound to favour short-term production of intense present pleasure from, for example, sex and drugs, with no thought for your future. In fact the Cyrenaics do not have to hold this position; they only have to hold that reflection on and concern for your life as a whole has value only insofar as it tends to produce present pleasure. This means that overall reflection about your life can have value only instrumentally, as a means to something else. This thought seems to have been found deeply unpersuasive; at any rate the Cyrenaics were never more than an outlying school in ancient ethical thought.

The greatest pleasure is tranquillity: Epicurus

Epicurus seems to have learned from their failure, and he makes an effort to present pleasure as a candidate for happiness that meets the overall demands, thus making his theory more acceptable and mainstream. Your concern with your whole life, he thinks, is not just a means to enjoyment of the present; rather, it matters to you in its own right, as people commonly think. However, the happy life is, in fact, a life of pleasure.

We can see from the moves already made that this is going to sound strange: how can focusing on short-term gratifications *also* be a long-term concern with what matters overall in your life? Epicurus has to deny that pleasure is always short-term enjoyment. There are two kinds of pleasure, he insists, and while one of them is the kind of enjoyment that people get from activities such as eating, drinking, sex, and the like, and is a 'movement', there is also another, 'static' kind, and *this* is what we should be seeking as the right way of achieving the happy life. Static pleasure is the absence of bodily pain and mental trouble; it is the state where you are functioning without impediment or discomfort. Epicurus boldly claims that this state is the highest pleasure that we can achieve—that is, you achieve happiness not

by doing things that make you feel good, but by so ordering your life that you achieve this condition of painlessness and tranquillity. Unsurprisingly, doing this involves 'sober reasoning', which scrutinizes your life carefully and rejects activities which will result overall in impingements on your tranquillity. Hence short-term gratification and success is rejected if the results will lead to a less balanced and undisturbed plan of life overall. The Epicurean happy life, then, far from being a wild pursuit of fun experience, turns out to be a cautious and risk- averse strategy for maintaining tranquillity. Critics did not tire of pointing out that, even if this is an acceptable idea of living happily, it is a peculiar conception of the most *pleasant* way we could live. It also did not stop ancient critics, and people who knew little about Epicurus, from caricaturing him as a dissolute glutton (Figure 2).

We can see why, given the ancient framework for ethics, hedonism is at a disadvantage. Hedonists seem condemned to giving an implausible account either of happiness, as with Aristippus, or of pleasure, as with Epicurus.



2. Epicurus, from one of the Boscoreale silver cups. Epicurus' skeleton, accompanied by a pig, reaches for a cake on a table. Above the cake are the words: 'Pleasure is the final end'. Opposite him the skeleton of Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, who holds that virtue is the final end, points to stress his disagreement.

Our modern conception of happiness is frequently understood in terms of pleasure (something aided by the wide and confused way we use 'happy'), and this can make it hard at first to see the appeal of ancient theories of happiness. If happiness is just getting what you want, then the ideas in the Choice of Heracles make no sense. However, our contemporary ideas about happiness derive from many sources and also contain elements more congenial to eudaimonism. We think of a happy life as involving achievement and success, for example, rather than just getting what you want. Theories of happiness as fulfilling whatever desires you have systematically run into problems once we face them with thoughts about our life as a whole.

Happiness and virtue

Until recently, though, the really alien idea in the Choice of Heracles would have been thought to be the role of Virtue. In modern ethical thought, until quite recently, virtue had become an unfamiliar concept, one that could be understood only historically and could not be seriously used in ethical thinking. In the last 30 years, however, 'virtue ethics' has had a spectacular comeback. Once again, however, we find that there is not a perfect match between our notion of virtue and the ancient one, and so some explanation and comparison is needed.

A minimal conception of ancient virtue is that of having a systematic concern to do the morally right thing. All that this assumes is that we have some grip on the idea of doing what is morally right, as opposed to what is wrong. We do not have to start with an elaborate theory as to what is morally right; our account of this is deepened as the account of virtue develops.

Virtue is a richer notion than this, but already it is distinguished from non-moral concerns—the idea, for example, that virtue is a sort of non-moral 'excellence'. (Unfortunately, a misguided attempt to 'modernize' ancient ethical texts has led some translators to

render the Greek word *arete* by 'excellence' rather than the supposedly old-fashioned 'virtue', thus obscuring the point that the texts are about morality. This is especially unfortunate now that modern moral philosophers are recognizing the moral import of virtue (Figure 3).)

Someone wanting to be prepared to do the morally right thing, not just occasionally but systematically, will have to have developed self-mastery and strength of mind to overcome the (very many) incentives we have to do something else. Hence it is not surprising that Virtue tells Heracles that her way is difficult and often unpleasant and frustrating. It is fine to do the morally right thing, but the virtuous person has to do a lot more than that. She has to develop a disposition, a firm state, of doing the morally right thing. And to get to that point she has to have developed two things, a firm understanding of morality and the willingness to act on it. Neither is easy or rapidly developed, and by the time someone is virtuous she will have made herself into a certain kind of person. Hence there is a connection between virtue and your life as a whole: becoming virtuous is becoming a person with a certain kind of *character*, and this requires reflecting in a thoughtful way about your life as a whole and the kind of person you aspire to be, as well as having the motivation to follow through on this. Neither is going to happen if you simply go along satisfying your desires and never developing the ability to think and act in the long term.

The modern conception of virtue is in many ways weaker than this. A virtue is often thought of as a kind of habit of acting in a certain way; this makes the virtues look like separate habits which grow up in locally isolated ways, since it certainly seems that you can develop a habit of generous giving without having a habit of acting bravely. In the ancient way of looking at it, isolated habits of action have to be unified by your understanding of what is morally appropriate, since it could hardly be the case that morality made one set of requirements for generosity and another, quite



3. Arete (Virtue) is one of the figures on the façade of the Library of Celsus in Ephesus. The library, a gift to the city from a wealthy man, proclaims that as well as being useful its 12,000 volumes have ethical value.

unrelated set for courage. In ancient ethics the point is not to have localized virtues but to *be virtuous*, to have the unified understanding which grounds all the virtues and is called practical wisdom or *phronesis*.

The ancient conception of virtue, moreover, is one in which practical wisdom takes the form of practical reasoning which is integrated with the motivation to do it. The person who understands what the moral action requires, but has to battle down contrary motivation in order to do it, is not yet virtuous, but only self-controlled. Virtue requires that the person's motivation go along with her understanding.

Virtue, then, is a pretty demanding idea, in the ancient way of looking at it. It's not hard to see why critics of Epicurus' hedonism charged that he could not account for virtue. If pleasure is what we should be going for as our overall aim, then it is hard to see why we should care about the claims of morality except as means to gaining pleasure or avoiding pain. Epicurus denies that he is committed to this, but his critics seem to have the better of him here.

Can you be happy on the rack?

Most pressing, in ancient ethical debates, is the issue of the place of virtue in happiness. Virtue is the right pathway to the happy life, but this leaves many options open.

Happiness is our overall aim, the goal for whose sake we do and seek everything else, while we don't seek to be happy for any further reason. Being a virtuous person will matter for this, but surely, we may think, common sense requires that other things matter too—for example, having a reasonable amount of money and other necessities, achieving success and so on. How could a happy life be a completely poverty-stricken and unsuccessful one?

Aristotle, who has considerable respect for common sense, thinks that this reaction of ours is an important one. Happiness, he holds, does require some amount of 'external goods' like money and success. On their own, no amount of such goods could make you happy, since whether or not you have them is not primarily up to you, and he thinks that, once you have begun to reflect ethically on your life, happiness must come from your own reflection on and organization of your life, and cannot just lie in external goods that circumstances can give and take away. Aristotle, however, fights shy of the idea that you can make yourself happy by making yourself virtuous. If that were so, he says, then a virtuous person would be happy even if he met with great and undeserved misfortunes, such as being tortured on the rack—and *that* would be hopelessly absurd.

Aristotle's conclusion tends to sound reasonable to us, since we have almost certainly never thought that being a virtuous or moral person is sufficient for having a happy life; so we can miss the point that in terms of the ancient theories it is a very unsatisfactory position to be in. He has to hold that the kind of person you are matters for having a happy life more than having money, status, and so on, which matter only a certain amount; but he cannot say just how much they matter, since he is unwilling to say that a person who loses just that amount of money, status, or whatever is bound to be unhappy. Often he stresses that what is significant for living a happy life is not the goods you have but the use you make of them; just as the shoemaker does the best he can with whatever leather he has, people who have suffered misfortunes do the best they can with what circumstances allow them. Hence he is unwilling to allow that a virtuous person who at the end of his life falls into great misfortune (such as Priam, the good king of Troy who lives to see his sons killed and city destroyed) must be considered to have lost their happiness. On the other hand, he wants to skirt what he sees as the ridiculous conclusion that the virtuous person is, just by being virtuous, happy whatever bad things happen to him. Hence he can allow

neither that Priam after the fall of Troy is happy, nor that he is unhappy; he is torn between the commonsense view that of course he isn't happy, and the more theoretical idea that he has not lost his happiness, since happiness has to come from what you have made of your life, not from what other people do to you. So Aristotle's position is not really coherent—an irony, since he is the ancient philosopher most popular with and appealed to by modern authors developing theories of 'virtue ethics'.

Plato and the Stoics, more willing than Aristotle to discount ordinary views, defend the view that being virtuous *is* sufficient for a happy life. We can see that this is not, in the framework of ancient ethical thinking, the disastrously high-minded but implausible claim that it would seem if brought out without preface nowadays, but it may still seem unrealistic.

They think, however, that Aristotle makes a mistake in allowing that external evils subtract from the contribution to happiness that virtue makes. In fact, they think, virtue has a quite different kind of value. The Stoics put this point dramatically by saying that virtue is the only thing that is *good*, whereas health, money, and so on should be called 'indifferent', although if we naturally go for something, such as health, it is a 'preferred indifferent'. They were not afraid to make themselves sound somewhat ridiculous by inventing new terminology which disallowed straightforward computation including both virtue and external goods.

But is it just high-minded assertion that virtue is what matters most? Among the ways this is defended is the view, widespread in ancient ethics, that virtue is a kind of understanding of moral value (an understanding which, as we have seen, includes and is not opposed to affect and positive motivation), one that can be seen as an expertise or skill, exercised on the materials provided by the circumstances of your life. Just as a product or a work of art can be produced skilfully even with limited or inferior materials (something clearest in the performing arts) so a life can be well,

and so happily lived even though the circumstances the person had to work on were inferior or positively bad. Aristotle comes near this idea when he compares the person in misfortune to the shoemaker doing the best he can with inferior leather; but he is too impressed by the idea that the product will be inferior to appreciate the point that the exercise of skill, the actual performance of the expert, may well be as impressive (or more so) in reduced circumstances as in good ones. The idea that virtue is a skill and that external advantages are its material makes prominent the idea that you make your own life; whatever you have to work with, the moral quality of your life comes from the way you live it, the choices you make, and their implications for your character.

This idea is strikingly egalitarian, and accounts for the Stoic position that happiness is attainable not just by those well provided by life with money, good looks, and status, but also by those who have bad luck: slaves, the conquered, people in limited social positions, like most women in the ancient world. It is notable that two of our major Stoic texts from the period of the Roman empire come from Marcus Aurelius, an emperor, and from Epictetus, a freed slave. Stoicism was available equally to both of them as a philosophy to live by; the emperor learnt from the former slave's teachings.

But if external goods do not contribute to our happiness, why should we even bother with them? The Stoic position here is subtle and hard to express briefly, but important here is the idea that we should make moral decisions from where we are. When you start to think about virtue, you are not a blank slate; you already have a given nature with needs for food, security, and so on, and also a social position: you already have a family, a nation, a job. It would be absurd, flouting human nature, to try to sacrifice or ignore these facts in the name of virtue; rather, we should aim to deal virtuously with them, always remembering that the demands of virtue guide and constrain the use we make of them.

Can you be happy on the rack?

'[T]he happy man needs the goods of the body and external goods, i.e. those of fortune.

.. in order that he may not be impeded . . . Those who say that the victim on the rack or the man who falls into great misfortunes is happy if he is good are, whether they mean to or not, talking nonsense.'

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII, chapter 13

'Aristotle's works on this, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and others, have ideas about virtue which are petty and grovelling and vulgar . . . they dare to grab from virtue the diadem and royal sceptre which she holds inalienably from Zeus. They do not permit her to make us happy, but put her on a level with money, status, noble birth, health, beauty and other things which are common to virtue and vice. Just as any of these without virtue is not sufficient to render its possessor happy, so virtue without these, they say, is in the same way insufficient to make its possessor happy. How, then, is the value of virtue not destroyed and overthrown?'

Atticus, 2nd-century CE Platonist

Virtue, ancient and modern

'Virtue ethics' has recently moved to the foreground of contemporary moral thinking, and with it an engagement with ancient ethical theories (unfortunately with a disproportionate emphasis on Aristotle). A common worry, which threatens to isolate the ancients from us, is that the development of a virtue is the development of a habit of doing the morally right thing—but what that is, is given by what virtuous people in your society do.

Virtues develop within cultures and traditions; noticing this obvious enough point sometimes produces the charge that eudaimonist ethics is essentially conservative. Aristotle delineates the virtues recognized in *his* society; but these are the virtues of a privileged elite—free adult Greek males—and have dubious moral relevance beyond that, or to potential social improvements.

This common charge misses the point. Of course we begin by emulating the people we recognize as virtuous in our society; hence, unsurprisingly, virtues differ between cultures. But this is all prior to the beginning of ethical thought; ancient ethics begins at the point when the individual starts to reflect about her life as a whole, and makes decisions which recognize the necessity of choosing between options, as Heracles does.

The ancient ethical agent takes charge of his life; as practical reasoning develops he becomes ever more in control of it, and ever more responsible for the quality of it. Of course the result is different now from what it was in ancient Greece. How could it not be? The options are different. What is the same is the difference that is made when the agent stops drifting along in her life and taking for granted the social pressures on it, and starts to think ethically about it and the form it takes.

Ancient ethical thought is attractive because, among other things, it unites two concerns which are hard to find together in other traditions. One is a sense of the demands of morality, the recognition that morality makes a huge difference to all of your life. The other is a rootedness in concerns that we all have, and have difficulty making ethical sense of—family, jobs, commitments, friends, and the business of everyday living. The person who follows philosophy to the point of holding that virtue is sufficient for happiness has travelled a long way from her original concerns, and yet has never abandoned them.

Aristotle on ethics

Two versions of Aristotle's works on ethics have come down to us, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*. Neither is a finished work intended for the ancient equivalent of publication; they are both collections of lecture and research notes on ethical topics, divided into 'books' (a book being the extent of a papyrus roll). They shared three books, and at some point one, the Nicomachean version, became the standard version, while the other, Eudemian version, was neglected. Recently the Eudemian version has had a revival of interest, and good translations are now available. The differences between the two versions show that Aristotle continued until his death to work on the difficulties in ethical ideas like those of character, virtue, and pleasure.

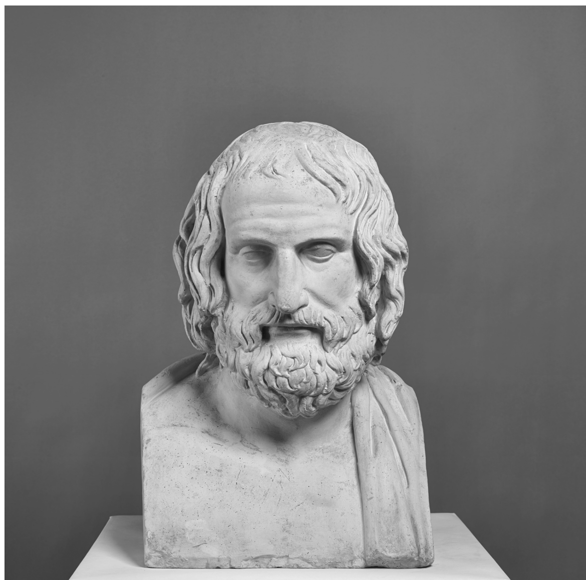
Chapter 2
Humans and beasts: understanding ourselves

Medea's revenge

Medea, daughter of the King of Colchis, has betrayed her country and family out of love for the Greek adventurer Jason, who has brought her back to Greece. Now they have fallen on hard times, and to mend his fortunes Jason has left Medea and their two sons and is to marry the daughter of the King of Corinth. He does not understand the depth of her outrage; the depths of her sacrifice and devotion do not register with him. Medea realizes that there is only one way to bring home to Jason what he has done, what kind of commitment he has discounted. The only way to hurt him as much as he has hurt her is to kill their sons, which will leave him alone, without family or descendants, with a deserted and empty life. But can she do this? They are her children too.

In Euripides' (Figure 4) famous play, produced at Athens in the 5th century BCE, Medea resolves to kill her sons, then goes back on her resolve when she sees them. Sending them away, she steels herself to do the deed, and speaks words which were to become famous:

> I know that what I am about to do is bad, but anger is master of my plans, anger which is the source of the greatest troubles for humankind.



4. Bust of Euripides.

She recognizes two things going on in her: her plans and her anger or *thumos*. She also recognizes that her anger is 'master of' the plans she has rationally deliberated on carrying out.

What is going on here? We may think that nothing is going on that a philosopher needs to concern herself with; we simply have something which happens every day, though usually not in such spectacular situations. I think it better for me to do A than B, but am led by anger, or some other emotion, to do B instead.

But how do we understand what is going on? How can I genuinely think that A is the better thing to do, if I end up doing B? How can anger, or any other emotion or feeling, get someone to go against what they have deliberately resolved on doing? Until we have some systematic way of understanding this, we and the way

we act are mysterious to ourselves. Many people, of course, do remain this way, with many of the sources of their actions and their patterns of behaviour opaque to themselves. But the society in which Euripides' play was produced, and continued to be a classic, fostered a kind of thinking, the kind we call philosophical thinking. This kind of reflective, probing thinking regarded Medea's situation as calling for explanation and understanding in terms that they, and we so many years later, can readily recognize as philosophical.

As already indicated, the question of what, if anything, distinguishes ancient philosophy and its methods will emerge by the end of the book; here we will focus on an issue where we can readily understand what ancient philosophers are doing.

The Stoics: the soul as a unity

Are there really two distinct things operating in Medea, her plans and her furious anger? How do they relate to Medea herself, who is so lucidly aware of what is going on? One school of ancient philosophers, the Stoics, developed a distinctive view of Medea as part of their ethics and psychology. They think that the idea that there are really two distinct forces or motives at work in Medea is an illusion. What matters in this situation is always *Medea* herself, the person, and it is wrong to think in terms of different parts of her. After all, she is quite clear about how her thoughts are going. First she resolves to do one thing, then to do another—but these are both *her* resolves, decisions that she comes to as a result of giving weight to resentment on the one hand or love on the other.

Medea as a whole veers now in one direction, now in another. How then can she come to a considered judgement as to what to do, and then act on anger which is stronger than this? What happens, the Stoics think, is that, being in an emotional state, she follows the reasons which go with that state: she seeks revenge because that is how angry people think. But there is no real

Stoicism

Stoicism is a philosophical school named after the Stoa Poikile or Painted Porch, a colonnaded building in Athens where the first heads of the school taught. The school was founded by Zeno of Citium, who arrived in Athens in 313 BCE. After Zeno the most influential head of the school was Chrysippus of Soli (*c*.280–208 BCE) who wrote extensively on just about every philosophical topic, and produced what became standard Stoic positions, especially as he presented strong arguments for a variety of them. Stoicism often presents itself at first in a deliberately harsh light, emphasizing doctrines that are so far from common sense as to be paradoxical. However, Stoicism as a philosophy is holistic—that is, its parts can be developed separately, but ultimately the aim is to understand them all in relation to the other parts. Hence Stoic 'paradoxes' increasingly make sense and acquire conviction as they are appreciated against the background of Stoic arguments and connected ideas. There are thus many ways of teaching Stoicism; where you begin depends on the audience's level of interest and expertise. Epictetus, a later Stoic (*c*.50–130 CE), taught in a way that appealed directly to his audience's interest in ethical and social matters, and accounts of his teaching have continued to be used as a vivid introduction to Stoic thought. The universal aspect of Stoicism is illustrated by the fact that Epictetus, a former slave, was influential on many later thinkers, including the Emperor Marcus Aurelius and the Neoplatonist Simplicius.

division within Medea's self. She oscillates between different decisions as a whole; there is no inner battle of parts of her. She is like the example Chrysippus used to explain emotion: a runner who is going too fast to stop, and so is out of control *as a whole*. When, therefore, she says that anger is master of her plans, what is meant is that anger is in control of them; she is reasoning,

but the way she does it has been taken over by anger and achieves its aims. The angry person does not cease to reason—she doesn't act blindly—but her reasoning is in the service of anger.

The Stoics think that there are no parts or divisions to the human soul, and that it is all rational. (By the soul they mean the item that makes humans live in a characteristically human way.) Emotions are not blind, non-rational forces which can overcome rational resolve; they are themselves a kind of reason which the person determines to act on. 'It is precisely this, gratifying her anger and being revenged on her husband, that she thinks more advantageous than saving her children,' says Epictetus, a later Stoic. Blind fury could not lead to Medea's carefully planned and self-aware revenge.

But, we say, Medea could not help acting as she did; she was overcome by passion, so surely she had no real choice. No, says Epictetus; she thought she had no real alternative, but this was wrong. She could have adjusted to her loss, difficult though this would be. 'Stop wanting your husband, and nothing you want will fail to come about,' he says. Everything I do, I am responsible for; there is always something else I could have done, some other attitude I could have taken up. To say I am overcome by emotion is to evade the fact that I was the one who acted, who thought at the time that what I was doing was the right thing to do. Epictetus thinks that we should sympathize with Medea, who acted, after all, 'from a great spirit'; we can understand her reasons for revenge even when we see why she would have done better to reject them. 'She did not know where the power lies to do what we want—that this is not to be got from outside ourselves nor by changing and rearranging things.'

The Stoic view of emotions as a kind of reason is probably unfamiliar, and tends to sound odd when first introduced. I have also plunged into the middle of things by starting with the Stoics,

Plutarch

Plutarch (*c.*46 CE–*c.*119 CE) of Chaeronea, a later Platonist, gives this account of the Stoic description of the workings of emotion: 'But [the Stoics] say that emotion is not something distinct from reason, and there are not two things differing and conflicting, but only one and the same reason which turns now one way and now the other. We don't notice this because of the suddenness and speed of the change. We don't perceive that it is the same aspect of the soul with which we by nature desire and then change our minds, get angry and feel fear, are carried away to something disgraceful by pleasure and then recover when we are carried back again. Indeed they think that desire, anger, fear and suchlike are beliefs and bad judgements, which do not come about in one part of the soul, but involve the soul's entire directive aspect, whose inclinations, yieldings, assents and urges they are; in general they are a kind of activities which can change in a moment—just as when children charge at something it is violent and intense but also feeble and unstable, because children are weak.'

Plutarch, who opposes this account, at once adds that of course we all know that our experience is nothing like this!

who belong to the period of philosophy after Aristotle, often called 'Hellenistic'. We are likely to be more familiar with the philosophical interpretation of Medea that I shall now turn to. It appears nearer to common sense and it comes from Plato, an earlier and much better-known philosopher.

Plato: the soul has parts

Plato takes the phenomenon of psychological conflict, being torn between two options, to show that the person so torn is not really a unity; he is genuinely rent apart between the motivational pull

Plato

Plato of Athens (427–347 BCE) is the best-known ancient philosopher, largely because he was also a great writer and produced not philosophical treatises but a number of self-contained dialogues. The dialogue form formally distances Plato from the views of anyone in the dialogue, and this forces the reader to think for herself what positions are being discussed, and what the upshot is, rather than accepting what is said on Plato's authority. Plato's ideas are original, bold, and wide ranging. In the ancient world he was influential for the form of his philosophical ideas as much as for the content. Two major Platonic traditions traced themselves to his work. The Sceptical Academy, Plato's own school, took its task, for hundreds of years until it came to an end in the 1st century BCE, to be that of arguing against the views of others without relying on a position of their own. In contrast, the later Platonists, beginning from the 1st century BCE, were interested in studying Plato's own ideas, and in teaching and furthering them as a system, 'Platonism'. The relationship of the more positive tradition to the earlier, sceptical one was varied and often contested.

of two or more distinct parts of his soul. Plato uses the example of a person who strongly desires to drink, but reasons that he should not do so because this would be bad for his health. He is, then, pulled towards taking the drink, and also, at the same time and in the same respect, pulled away from it. However, the argument goes, the same thing can't be affected in opposing ways at the same time, so it must be that it is not the person as a whole who is in this contradictory state, but different parts of him which do the dragging in opposite directions. When I reflect correctly, then, I can see that *I* don't want to drink and also want not to drink; rather, part of me, which Plato calls desire, wants to drink, and another part of me, which is reason (my ability to grasp and act on reasons), is motivated to refrain.

Plato thinks that our psychological life is too complex to be accounted for purely in terms of reason and desire. There is a third part, called spirit or anger, and involving most of what we would call the emotions. It can conflict with desire, as Plato argues (in the fourth book of the *Republic*) from another case of conflict, where giving in to a pathological desire leads the person to feel angry and ashamed with himself. This emotional part is distinguished from reason, on the grounds that it is found in animals and children that don't reason; although it often endorses reason, it is essentially inarticulate and unable fully to grasp, or to originate, reasons.

The parts of the soul are not on a par; reason is not merely a part but grasps the best interests of all the parts and hence of the person as a whole. Plato tirelessly insists that in the soul reason should rule, since it can understand its own needs and also those of the other parts, whereas the other parts are limited and short-sighted, alive only to their own needs and interests. The real contrast, then, is between reason, articulate guardian of the interests of the whole person, and the other parts, which can't look beyond their own needs and concerns. Hence it is not very surprising that, despite Plato's long imaginative descriptions of his three-part soul, the point of his position was seen as that of contrasting a rational with a non-rational part of me, and so as compatible with a two-part soul.

If Plato is right, then when Medea resolves that it is best to spare her children, but is then led by fury to kill them, there is a real internal division and battle going on in her. Her reason works out what is for the best for her, but is then overwhelmed by another part of her soul, the furious anger, which is a separate source of motivation and in this case gets her to take what her reason understands to be the worse course.

Clearly Plato will take Medea's crucial lines to be saying that her reason works out what the best course is, but that anger

thereupon turns out to be a stronger force, which overwhelms reason. And this might seem to be common sense; we do often have experiences that we are tempted to describe as inner conflict, with reason or passion winning because it is *stronger*. It seems more commonsensical at first than the Stoic claim that anger and other emotions *are* certain kinds of reason. And yet the Stoics do better than Plato in explaining how the person carried away by fury still can act in a self-aware, complex, and planned way. Medea kills her children; horrible though this is, it is a deliberate action; she doesn't run amok. Can the anger that drives her really motivate her in a way that has nothing to do with reason?

There are two distinct ways that Plato's ideas can be developed when we think about inner conflict and the problems we have in understanding what is happening in us. Both of them are found in Plato, who clearly has not realized that he needs to choose between them.

What is a 'part' of the soul, like anger or other emotions? So far, we have gone with a fairly intuitive idea; there seem to be two distinct sources of motivation within us. And we can form a fairly clear notion of the nature and function of the part which is reason. After all, we reason all the time, about the way things are or ought to be, and about what to do; and what in each case I am reasoning about is what *I* shall do, not what part of me shall do.

But what about the part of the soul that motivates me separately from reason? Can it be thought of as a purely irrational force? Although the language of passion fighting with and overwhelming reason might suggest this, it is hard to see how deliberate actions can be produced by something that is a completely irrational push. Surely there must be *something* in Medea's anger which is at least responsive to reason?

In many parts of his work Plato assumes that the parts of the soul are all sufficiently rational for them to communicate with and

understand one another. They can all agree, in which case the person functions as an integrated whole. While the parts other than reason cannot do what reason can, namely think in terms of the person as a whole, they can still respond to what reason requires, and so understand it in a limited way. Desire, for example, can come to understand that reason forbids its satisfaction in certain circumstances, and so can come to adjust, not putting up a fight. Desire has thus been persuaded and educated by reason, rather than repressed. In terms of the whole person, when I see that some kind of action is wrong, I feel less desire to do it, and find it less difficult to refrain. Plato represents this position as one in which the soul's parts agree and are in harmony and concord. The parts other than reason have sufficient grip on what reason holds to be right that they willingly conform themselves to this, and the result is a harmonious and integrated personality.

This picture implies, though, that reason has a kind of internal hold on the other parts—it asks them, so to speak, to do things in terms that they can understand and agree to.

But then won't the parts other than reason have to have a kind of reason of their own, in order to understand and go along with what the reason part demands? And then won't all the parts have to have their own reasons?—which makes it unclear how we are supposed to have found a part of the soul which is *separate* from reason.

Suppose there were some aspect of me which was entirely non-rational and separate from reason: this would indeed look like a different part of me, but with no reason internal to it at all, it is not clear how it can listen to reason, or conform itself to what reason requires in the interests of the whole person. Such a part looks like something subhuman. And indeed we find that in some of Plato's most famous passages about the divided soul he represents the parts of the soul other than reason as non-human animals. In one passage near the end of the *Republic* he says that

we all contain a little human trying to control two animals. One part, spirit, is fierce, but stable and manageable—a lion. The other part, desire, is an unpredictable monster, constantly changing shape.

Clearly Plato thinks that our emotions and desires are forces within us which are in themselves subhuman, but can be trained and moulded by reason to form part of a human life—indeed, of what he thinks to be the happiest form of human life.

Another passage, in the *Phaedrus*, is even more famous. The human soul is here a chariot, with reason, the charioteer, driving two horses. One horse is biddable and can learn to obey commands, but the other is both deaf and violent, and so can be controlled only by force. In a vivid passage Plato depicts the charioteer struggling to manage sexual desire, represented by the bad horse, only with great effort; that horse threatens to get out of control and has to be yanked back, struggling all the way. It learns to refrain only through fear of punishment.

There is something plausible in this picture as a picture of ourselves; it often does seem that we are motivated by forces within us that are resistant to the reasons that we accept. But if we think systematically of some of the consequences, the picture is considerably more disturbing. If part of me is properly to be represented as an animal, then there is part of me that is essentially less than human, and so not properly part of *me*. It becomes part of me only when subject to control by what really is me—reason. There is a kind of self-alienation at work here; part of me is regarded as being outside the self proper, because it is the kind of thing it is, and as being always potentially disobedient to my real self.

It is hard not to feel that something like this is going on when Galen, a later physician who tends to think of himself as a Platonist, describes Medea:

> She knew that she was performing an impious and terrible deed … But then again anger like a disobedient horse which has got the better of the charioteer dragged her by force towards the children … and back again reason pulled her … And then again anger … and then again reason.

On this view Medea's final action is the result of a battle of forces in which the stronger wins, overpowering reason by brute force. This makes it much harder to see how Medea is in fact performing a deliberate action than it is if we accept the Stoic analysis.

Epictetus thinks it obvious that Medea is acting in accordance with a deliberate view of what the best thing is for her to do; the problem is that this view is corrupted and malformed by anger. Given her resentment, what she did makes perfect sense; she is not overwhelmed, her reason drowned out.

These different ways of looking at yourself make a difference to the attitude you take to other people who act under the influence of anger. Epictetus is sympathetic to Medea. Her view of what she should do was wrong—appallingly wrong—but we can understand it, and even sympathize with it, when we reflect that it is the response of a proud and dignified individual to a betrayal which refused to recognize her worth. We should pity Medea, says Epictetus; he certainly thinks that we can understand her point of view. Galen, by contrast, regarding her as overwhelmed by the animal-like part of the soul, sees her as animal-like, and like 'barbarians and children who are spirited by nature'. Medea is 'an example of barbarians and other uncivilized people, in whom anger is stronger than reason. With Greeks and civilized people, reason is stronger than anger.' (No prizes for guessing that Galen sees himself as a civilized Greek.)

Plato's view, then, is more complex than he realizes. It can lead in either of two very different directions: to seeing parts of myself as subhuman and not truly me, or it can lead to seeing

them as junior partners with reason, either squabbling or making agreements. The second view is obviously much nearer to the Stoics.

Problems and theory

Plato and the Stoics see Medea in terms of very different accounts of human psychology and the emotions. So we find that the philosophical attempt to understand what is going on when we act because of emotion against our better judgement leads not to general agreement but to quite radical disagreement and to sharply conflicting conclusions. This is one reason why the example is an excellent introduction to thinking about ancient philosophy; for the tradition of philosophical thinking that developed in Greece and Rome is very often marked by strong disagreement and debate. Philosophical positions tend to be developed in dialogue and confrontation with other positions. Coming after Plato, the Stoics explicitly reject the idea of distinct parts to the soul; and Galen works out his own Platonist view in disagreeing with the Stoic view of the emotions.

Philosophy in the ancient world was, with few exceptions, a way of thinking that developed in contested areas of discussion. Philosophers and their followers held, of course, that their own view was the true one, but they did not expect universal agreement; everyone was aware of the existence of rival, often equally prestigious positions.

What, then, does a philosophical explanation or theory do for us? We might think that we are no better off in understanding Medea after learning of the Stoic–Platonic dispute over the right way to interpret what is going on in her.

It is not so easy, however, to resist the search for a philosophical explanation of the phenomenon we are concerned with. I have chosen Medea as an example which was not only discussed in

ancient philosophy but has continued to be a subject of lively concern in the modern world. If we look at artistic representations of the subject, or watch a performance either of Euripides' original play or of an updated version, we immediately see that a stand has to be taken on the Stoic–Platonic debate. Is Medea to be represented as overrun by passion which is overwhelming her power to reason what the best thing is for her to do? Or is she to be represented as a woman who is lucidly doing what she sees to be a terrible thing for herself as well as others, because she is not able to let go her ideals of pride and dignity?

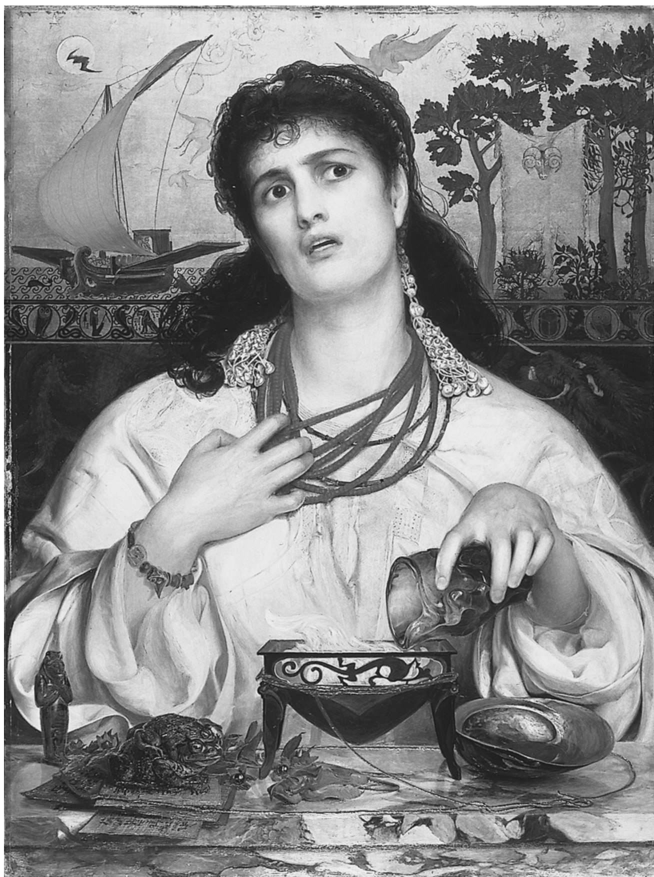
Two 19th-century pictures of Medea bring out this point acutely. Eugène Delacroix's Medea is what Galen has in mind: a human overwhelmed by irrational feelings to the point of appearing radically non-human. Half-naked for no very obvious reason, her hair wild, her vision symbolically shadowed, Medea writhes with her children in a dark cave, hunted like the animal she appears to be (Figure 5). Frederick Sandys's Symbolist picture, on the other hand, presents Medea as quite in control of what she is doing. Surrounded by the instruments of her revenge, which is just beginning, Medea is aware of, and troubled by, choosing the perverse course, but she is presented as reasoning in a controlled and deliberate way. The picture beautifies and aestheticizes revenge in a way distancing it from the Stoics, but it is still far nearer the Stoic than Galen's Platonic view (Figure 6).

There is no neutral way of presenting Euripides' *Medea*; directors and actors have to make fundamental decisions as to how she is to be represented, and they will be influenced by the translation or version used. This is one reason why she has remained a key case for discussion of reason and the passions. It seems, then, that any reflection about a case like this will reveal that we need to pursue philosophical explanation.

But philosophical explanation is itself divided! How then can it advance us?



5. Delacroix's Medea: a hunted animal.



6. Sandys's Medea: deliberately choosing evil.

Philosophical explications of what is going on in a puzzling and difficult case may not leave us with a general consensus. (The more puzzling the case, the less likely this is to happen.) But we are driven to reflect philosophically about reason and passion for the reason already mentioned: until we try to understand what is happening, we are opaque to ourselves. If I act in anger, and

reflect afterwards that I went against what I hold to be the best course, then I don't know why I acted as I did. If I accept Plato's theory, I will think of myself as internally divided, and my action as the result either of agreement between the parts of myself, or as the outcome of a battle between them (depending on whether I think of the parts other than reason as being themselves receptive to reasoning, or as non-rational, subhuman parts). If I accept the Stoic theory, I will think of myself as oscillating, as a whole, between different courses of action, motivated either by reasons of my overall good or by reasons infected by various emotions. Either way I will understand more about myself and other people.

Philosophical understanding, in the tradition of ancient philosophy, is, as we shall see, systematic, part of a large theory. Plato's idea that the soul has distinct parts is worked out in different contexts in different dialogues. In the *Timaeus*, for example, he argues that the soul's parts are actually located in different parts of the body. In the *Republic* he draws an elaborate analogy between the parts of the individual's soul and the parts of an ideal society. The Stoic theory of the emotions is part of their ethical theory, and also part of the account they give of the role of reason in human life and in the world as a whole.

Most ancient philosophers see their task as being that of understanding the world, a task which includes understanding ourselves, since we are part of the world. Aristotle is the philosopher who puts the point most memorably: humans, he says, all desire by nature 'to understand'. The Greek word here is often translated as 'to know', but this can be misleading. What is meant is not a piling-up of facts, but rather the achievement of understanding, something that we do when we master a field or body of knowledge and explain systematically why things are the way they are. We often begin looking for such explanations when we find things problematic, and Aristotle stresses that philosophy begins with wonder and puzzlement, and develops as we find more and more complex answers to and explanations for what

Aristotle

Aristotle (384–322 BCE), Plato's greatest pupil, differs from him in his methods quite radically. Aristotle is a problem-focused philosopher, beginning from puzzles and difficulties that arise in everyday thinking, and also, for philosophers, in the works of previous philosophers. He has a huge range of interests, from formal logic (which he invented) to biology, political thinking, ethics, literary theory, cosmology, rhetoric, constitutional history, metaphysics, and much more, including works on sleep and on the mechanisms of animal movement. He is a systematic thinker, using concepts like form and matter in a wide variety of philosophical contexts. His works, though, in the form we have them (his lecture and research notes) aspire to philosophical system rather than achieving it, so that it is the questioning and probing aspect of his thought which is most obvious. Later his work was systematized in often inappropriate ways (see p. 54).

were problems for us. We begin by being puzzled by the phenomenon of acting in passion against our better judgement; we understand it better when we have a theory which explains it to us in terms of a more general theory of human action. (Aristotle has his own theory on the topic, one distinctly closer to the Stoics than to Plato.)

What happens when I find that there are conflicting theories on the matter, and that holding one theory involves disagreeing with another? I am advancing further towards understanding, not retreating. For now it is clear that I have to put in some work for myself, in examining the different theories and the reasoning behind them—for I have to work out for myself which theory is most likely to be the right one. In the present case, it is clear that the Platonic and Stoic views can't both be right. Which is?

Whatever I conclude, I have to be drawn into the theories and their reasonings. If I just feel that one appeals more than the other, but cannot back this up with argument, I have given up on my original drive to understand what is going on, to get beyond feeling puzzled and find some explanation. Ancient philosophy (indeed, philosophy generally) is typically marked by a refusal to leave things opaque and puzzling, to seek to make them clearer and more transparent to reason. Hence reading ancient philosophy tends to engage the reader's reasoning immediately, to set a dialogue of minds going.

Ancient philosophy is sometimes taught as a procession of Great Figures, whose ideas the student is supposed to take in and admire. Nothing could be further from its spirit. When we open most works of ancient philosophy, we find that an argument is going on—and that we are being challenged to join in.

Chapter 3
Reason, knowledge, and scepticism

In Chapter 1 we explored an aspect of ancient philosophy—the ethical framework of virtue and happiness—which has turned out particularly fruitful for modern philosophical explorations. Now we shall look at some of the strands of ancient thinking about knowledge, and the lack of it, which on the face of it show more contrast than likeness to modern thinking on the topic.

Assumptions about knowledge

In modern epistemology, or theory of knowledge, certain assumptions are common. Among them is the view that the existence of knowledge must be justified against the sceptic, that is, the person who thinks that we can never know anything, because she holds that we can never meet the conditions for knowledge. Knowledge is taken to be, at least in part, a matter of being in the right relation to facts or information. (What is this right relation? Here we find very different views, which can barely be indicated here. Some philosophers stress justification, others the right causal connection, and there are sophisticated variants and combinations of these positions.) It is hard to imagine a modern epistemologist being impressed by the thought that your mechanic *knows* how to fix cars. It is equally hard to think of her finding it important that someone who knows lots of facts in science, say, may lack understanding of them. And what modern

epistemologist would greet an authoritative pronouncement that she in fact possessed knowledge by trying to refute it?

We can start to understand what is distinctive about ancient attitudes to knowledge by beginning with Socrates. His friend Chaerephon, we are told, asked the oracle of the god Apollo at Delphi whether anyone was wiser than Socrates, and Apollo replied that nobody was. On being told this, Socrates was surprised, and wondered what the oracle could possibly mean, since he was aware that he possessed no wisdom or expertise of his own. So he went round people considered experts, questioning them about their alleged expertise, but always finding either that they could produce no remotely adequate account of what they were supposed to be experts in, or that the expertise they did have was less important than they thought it to be. He concluded that Apollo's meaning must be that the wisest person is the person most aware of their own ignorance.

This minimal construal of what a god means by calling a human 'wise' is in keeping with a Greek tradition of emphasizing the gulf between human and divine capacities. It also brings out some assumptions about ancient epistemology. Socrates goes round denying that he has knowledge, but this is never understood to mean that he does not know ordinary, everyday facts; he is aware of knowing lots of these. Further, he sometimes claims to know quite substantial pieces of moral knowledge, such as that he should never do wrong, or abandon what he regards as his divine mission. What he denies having is knowledge in the sense of wisdom or understanding, which goes beyond mere knowledge of isolated facts and is assumed to be found, if at all, in people who are experts in something. When Apollo says that he is the wisest person, then, Socrates is troubled by it, since if a person is an expert in something, he would normally be expected at least to be aware of what he is an expert in. He responds to the oracle by trying to find someone wiser than he is, then, not out of a rude desire to show Apollo wrong, but because he does not understand

Socrates

Of all ancient philosophers, Socrates is the most recognizable. There is good reason for this; for ancient culture in general Socrates serves as the symbolic figure of the Philosopher. However, his widespread fame as a founding figure in philosophy is also remarkable, given that his life is elusive, he wrote nothing, and he left a series of wildly differing philosophical legacies.

Socrates lived from about 468 to 399 BCE. His father was a stonemason called Sophroniscus, his mother a midwife called Phainarete. His circumstances were initially prosperous, but by the end of his life he was poor, as a result of neglecting his practical affairs in his devotion to philosophy. His wife Xanthippe has an aristocratic name; she passed into legend as the shrewish wife of an unworldly and undomestic philosopher, but this may just be prejudice. They had three sons, one young at the time of Socrates' death. Later, unreliable tradition ascribes to him a second wife, Myrto.

In 399 Socrates was tried and executed. The charges are vague, and it has always been suspected that the real agenda was political anger at some of Socrates' followers. We shall never know the facts. Clearly Socrates was widely regarded as an annoying and subversive presence in Athens.

Socrates identified the practice of philosophy with personal discussion and questioning, refusing to write anything. His followers elevated him to be the founding figure of their mutually conflicting approaches to philosophy. Through his austere disciple Antisthenes, Socrates was regarded as the inspiration for the convention-rejecting Cynics. Through his disciple Aristippus, however, he was claimed as the first hedonist. Through the tradition of Plato's Academy he was hailed as the first sceptic. The Stoics regarded him as the founding figure of

their own highly systematic and definite theory. In the writings of his younger follower Xenophon he appears as a conventional moralizer. In the writings of Plato, Socrates appears in a variety of guises. Sometimes he is the questioner who undermines the pretensions of others to understanding; sometimes he puts forward positive claims about ethics and metaphysics; sometimes he merely introduces other philosophers who have things of their own to say. Socrates continued to be influential as the figure of the philosopher par excellence, and his refusal to commit himself to authoritative teaching made him a usefully malleable figure whose influence could be claimed for widely different views and approaches.

the oracle, and the only way to find out how he is the wisest person is to find out what the expertise is which he is supposed to have. And, since this is obviously not self-declaring, the only way to find it out is to see how well he compares with other people in understanding what they are supposed to be wise about or experts in; and this can only be achieved by questioning them about what they are supposed to understand.

A number of points emerge in Socrates' response. Interesting questions about knowledge are taken not to concern our relation to particular facts—how I can *know*, for example, that the cat is on the mat. Philosophical attention is focused on a more complex matter: the possession of wisdom (*sophia*—the wisdom loved by the *philosophos*). It is assumed, taken to be a matter beyond argument, that wisdom is not just knowing a lot of information, but being able to relate the individual known facts to one another in a unified and structured way, one that requires understanding of a field or area of knowledge. (A useful parallel is that of knowing a language, which obviously involves more than knowing individual pieces of information about vocabulary and syntax, and requires the understanding of how these fit together in a unified

The trial of Socrates

'The following sworn indictment has been brought by Meletus, son of Meletus, of Pitthos, against Socrates, son of Sophroniscus, of Alopeke. Socrates does wrong in not recognizing the gods which the city recognizes, and in introducing other, new divinities. Further, he is a wrongdoer in corrupting the young.'

This indictment against Socrates was preserved in the archives of Athens and reported by later scholars. Socrates was found guilty by 280 votes to 220. (Juries consisted of 500 citizens.) The prosecutor proposed death as a penalty. Socrates at first refused to allow that he had done anything deserving of a penalty, but eventually suggested a fine. The jury voted for death by a larger margin, 360 to 140.

way. The language example also brings out the point that this unified understanding is not a theoretical grasp cut off from practice, but involves a practical ability to apply the understanding in question.) The philosophically interesting kind of knowledge involves a complex of items grasped together in a way that enables the knower to relate them to one another and to the structure as a whole. In all but the simplest cases this grasp will require an articulate ability to do this relating, one which will explain why the different items play the roles they do in the system. (Think of teaching a language.) Such a grasp will typically be found in someone who has expertise (*techne*) in a subject.

Socrates never raises the question whether there is such a thing as wisdom or expertise. This would be silly, since there obviously are experts in some fields, such as crafts.

Presumably, though, Apollo meant more than that Socrates had the kind of expertise to be found in weavers and potters,

so Socrates' search is for expertise in matters of importance in human life. Hence he is particularly keen to question self-styled experts in virtue, or what is worthwhile in life. He questions these people on the topics that they claim to be experts in, and always succeeds in showing that they lack understanding of these topics, since they fail to explain satisfactorily why they say what they do. Socrates' questions do not start from a position of his own, since this would only weaken the point that it is *the other person* who is supposed to display understanding of what *he* claims to know.

When Socrates (Figure 7) deflates the self-styled experts by showing them, just from premises that they accept, that they don't understand the subject they have been pontificating about, they cannot defend themselves by faulting his views, since his views are not the basis of his arguments. They frequently, however, get annoyed with themselves for not being able to defend their position, and with Socrates for making them aware of this.

Understanding and what it involves

What would show that a person has wisdom and understanding comes to be referred to as 'giving an account', *logon didonai*. *Logos* is the ordinary Greek word for reason; what you say about the topic you are supposed to understand must give reasons in a way that explains the matter. Socrates' victims can produce plenty of words, but they fail to give a reasoned account of their subjects, and so are shown not to understand what they are talking about.

What are the standards for 'giving an account'? This is obviously crucial for the question of whether you really know, that is, understand something. Minimally, of course, you have to be able to keep your end up in an argument and show that your position is consistent. But something more positive than this seems required too. One major strand of ancient epistemology consists of

Differing views of Socrates

'Mankind can hardly be too often reminded, that there was once a man named Socrates, between whom and the legal authorities and public opinion of his time there took place a memorable collision . . . This acknowledged master of all the eminent thinkers who have since lived—whose fame, still growing after more than two thousand years, all but outweighs the whole remainder of the names which make his native city illustrious—was put to death by his countrymen . . . Socrates was put to death, but the Socratic philosophy rose like the sun in heaven, and spread its illumination over the whole intellectual firmament.'

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

'Socrates—that clown from Athens!'

Zeno of Sidon, Epicurean philosopher, 2nd century BCE

'We shall ignore Chaerephon's story about the oracle, since it is an utterly sophistical and cheap trick.'

'Socrates, the arguments you worked out are bogus. The conversations you had with the people you met are one thing, and what you did was another.'

Colotes, early Epicurean philosopher, 3rd century BCE

exploring the requirements for 'giving an account', providing the reasoned basis necessary if you are to have understanding of a field of knowledge.

In many of Plato's dialogues Socrates suggests that you have to be able to provide a satisfactory answer to the questioner who wants to know what virtue is, or courage, or friendship, or the like. This is obviously not provided by trivially appealing to the meaning of words; it has to express the nature of virtue, or courage,



7. The image of Socrates: physically ugly, intellectually an enchanter.

in such a way that the person to whom it is successfully conveyed will be able not only to recognize examples of virtue, or courage, but to explain why they are examples of the virtue in question, relating them to its nature. This exploration is sometimes called a search for 'Socratic definitions', although 'definition' is an unhappy term here.

One standing puzzle about these dialogues is the following. Socrates is ambitiously searching for understanding of difficult concepts like virtue and courage. But his approach is always to question others, starting only from premises that they accept. This kind of *ad hominem* arguing relies only on what the opponent accepts and what it produces, time after time, are conclusions as to what virtue, courage, friendship, and so on are *not.* Some self-styled expert makes a claim as to what virtue etc. are, and Socrates shows that this cannot be the right answer. This does not, however, seem to move us towards understanding what virtue, courage, and so on *are*. Socrates shows that others lack understanding, but not in a way that seems to be cumulative towards obtaining understanding of his own. This result has been interpreted in many ways. Plato is too sophisticated a writer to write many dialogues doing nothing but showing that Socrates again and again failed to produce results by his questioning. Plausibly, these dialogues show that a Socratic concern to probe others' claims about important matters has a crucial and continuing role in Plato's thought; it constantly reminds us that we need to query our own understanding of important matters, alongside trying to achieve knowledge by positive methods. If we cease to query our own assumptions and take them for granted, we risk falling into complacency and self-satisfaction, failing to notice the need to keep aware of problems and difficulties.

Plato has a variety of concerns with knowledge, to some of which we shall return. Some of his most famous passages, however, show the dominance of what we can call the expertise model for knowledge. What is taken to matter for knowledge is whether you can, as an expert can, grasp the relevant items in a way that relates

them to one another and to the field as a whole, and can give a reasoned account of this, one which explains the particular judgements you make and relates them to your unified grasp of the whole. And in some places Plato rethinks the crucial idea of giving a reasoned account, taking mathematics as his model.

In the *Republic*, Plato develops possibly the most ambitious model for knowledge that any philosopher has put forward: the aspiring knower has to complete an apprenticeship of many years' mathematical studies. Mathematics—by which he is primarily thinking of the kind of systematized geometry of which we have a later example in Euclid—is remarkable for its rigour, system, and clarity. It appears to have struck Plato as a perfect example of the kind of structured body of knowledge that had been presupposed all along by the expertise model. Moreover, all the features of the expertise model seem to fit mathematics in a clear and impressive way. Mathematics is not a heap of isolated results; particular theorems can clearly be seen to depend on other results which are proved in turn. The whole system begins from a clear and limited set of concepts and postulates. The way in which we get from these first principles to particular results is also lucid and rigorous. It is easy to see why Plato might see in an earlier version of Euclid a splendid model of knowledge as a structured and unified system, one where it is absolutely clear what the knower knows and how she knows it, how the system holds together, and what it is to give a reasoned account of what you know—namely, a proof.

Mathematics as a model for knowledge also introduces two new notes. One is that mathematical results are peculiarly unassailable; we do not waste time arguing that Pythagoras' theorem is wrong. We have seen that certainty and justification of what is known are not prominent in the cluster of issues that are the focus of the expertise model, where what matters is understanding that can be applied in practice. But Plato is clearly at some points attracted by the idea of a body of knowledge that is not open to serious questioning.

The other point flows from the fact that mathematics provides us with a body of firm knowledge which does not seem in any plausible way to have as its object the world that we experience, in an everyday way, through the senses. Pythagoras' theorem was not discovered by measuring actual drawn triangles and their angles, and irregularities in these are obviously irrelevant to it. Plato is attracted to the view that a body of knowledge can exist which we access solely by using our minds and reasoning. He is not the last philosopher to be tempted by the view that the powers of philosophical reason are more developed versions of our ability to reason mathematically, and so by the view that philosophical reasoning is essentially formal.

In the *Republic*'s central books, we find that to have knowledge requires mastery of a systematic field whose contents are structured as rigorously as the axioms and theorems in Euclid, and linked by chains of proof. Moreover, Plato goes one better than the mathematicians in claiming that philosophy does not begin from mere assumptions, but shows how everything flows from a first principle which is not merely assumed. Here matters become obscure, since Plato makes the ambitious philosophical system depend on what he calls the Form of the Good, which anchors the whole system without itself needing any further support. (Later versions of Platonism developed this thought, which Plato leaves at the stage of metaphor.) As with mathematics, what is known is a formal system—what Plato famously regards as the world of Forms—and not the world of experience revealed to us by the senses; indeed, Plato goes out of his way to stress the extent to which the person thinking in abstract mathematical terms will come to conclusions at odds with experience.

This is an *ideal*, something emphasized by the way that the only people who, Plato thinks, have a chance of attaining it are those who are exceptionally talented by nature and have been brought up in ideal cultural circumstances. This warns us against thinking

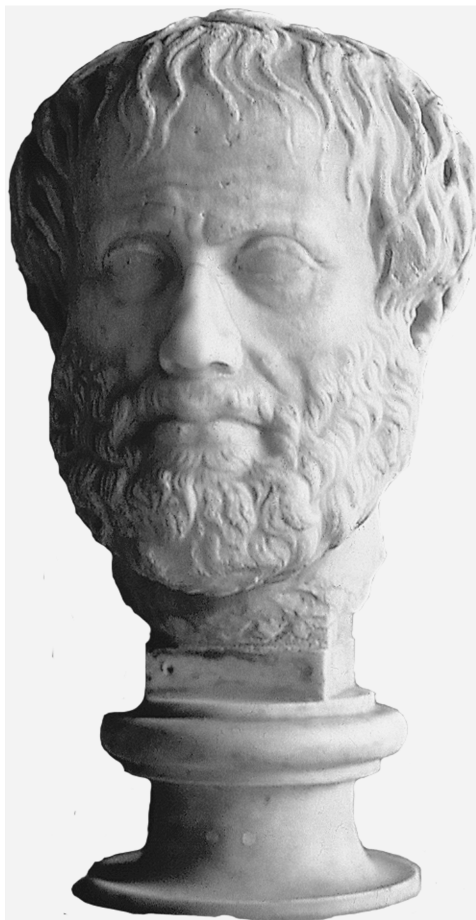
that we can find any actual example of knowledge. The expertise model on its own seemed to hold out the chance at least that knowledge was attainable. But when the requirements are made as formal and demanding as they become when mathematics is the model, the conditions for knowledge get set so high as to be unattainable by us.

Understanding and the sciences

Aristotle (Figure 8), in this as in many matters Plato's greatest pupil, takes over the *Republic* model, but with important modifications which make it philosophically far more fruitful. He develops the idea in his work on the structure of a completed body of knowledge, the unfortunately titled *Posterior Analytics*. (It is so called because it follows his treatise on logic, the *Prior Analytics*.)

For Aristotle, Plato goes wrong in thinking that all knowledge hangs together in a unified structure. This makes the mistake of thinking that all the objects of knowledge together make up a single system, and can be known as such. But, Aristotle thinks, there is no such single system; different branches of knowledge employ fundamentally different methods, and do so because their subject matters are fundamentally different. Aristotle does not disagree that something like Euclid's geometry is a reasonable model for knowledge; like Plato, he is willing to appeal to mathematics to make the idea of expertise more rigorous. But, he thinks, there is no such thing as knowledge as a whole, only the different kinds or branches of knowledge—or, as we are tempted to say, sciences. (The Greek word for knowledge, *episteme*, forms a plural, but we cannot say 'knowledges', and have to make do either with 'branches of knowledge' or 'sciences'. This can obscure the way that, for example, Aristotle's notion of a science is a restriction of Plato's conception of knowledge.)

As well as this radical 'departmentalizing' of knowledge, Aristotle imports a further difference. Whereas Plato focuses relentlessly on



8. Aristotle, portrayed as serious and studious.

the individual knower, Aristotle widens his epistemological view to take in many aspects of the *social* production of knowledge. It is not for nothing that 'science' is more appropriate to Aristotle's discussions of knowledge than to Plato's. Aristotle is aware of

the way that the development of a science, such as biology, requires research and observation from many people, and also that the single investigator does not reinvent the wheel every time, but relies on others' results and data and, more importantly, on their questions and framing of the problems. He himself begins his enquiries in a number of fields by first canvassing views on it that are reputable and widely held, or put forward by philosophers or other investigators. It is by entering into this tradition of previous enquiry and exploring the problems that it has thrown up that the investigator can make progress.

Hence Aristotle can distinguish (though it would have been nice if he had done so more clearly) between different aspects of the development of a body of knowledge. The data and observations a science relies on, built up by the cooperative activities of many people, are material for a science, not science itself. Pieces of information do not constitute knowledge until they are fitted into and form part of a structured system.

Hence to amount to knowledge, the results of research and observation must be given a place within the appropriate structure. In the *Posterior Analytics* this structure is laid out very rigidly, and the influence of the mathematical model is very obvious. The first principles of a science must be true, primary, and immediate, hold necessarily, and be explanatory of the results that they are the first principles of. Much effort has gone into exploring ways in which a science like, say, biology could fit such a model, and it is generally agreed that the model is unsuitably rigid for many Aristotelian sciences. The overall point is not lost, however: empirical research is needed to gather any information worth knowing, but knowledge comes only when we see how it fits into a formal explanatory structure.

Both Plato and Aristotle have an extremely ideal model of understanding. Neither doubts that knowledge is possible in principle, though for Plato particularly the conditions become

very idealized and removed from everyday life. Of course, given that they are working with the expertise model, the idea that knowledge is possible is not very radical. But what they are claiming is that we can have knowledge not merely of humdrum matters but of philosophically challenging and worthwhile subjects. Some version of this claim is common in most ancient philosophical schools.

Scepticism and belief

This is not the only approach to knowledge, however; we find very different ones. The most radical of these is traced in part to Socrates and in part to Pyrrho (a later philosopher who also wrote nothing). This is ancient scepticism (making Socrates one founder of scepticism). Unlike modern scepticism, the ancient movement does not limit itself to denying that *knowledge* is possible, leaving us with true belief. Ancient scepticism is as concerned with holding beliefs as with knowledge, and is best thought of as an intellectual position concerning the powers of reason, one far more radical than modern scepticisms.

The sceptic begins like everyone else, by searching for truth and for knowledge. This he does by investigating, querying others' reasons for what they claim, and looking for supporting reasons for positions of his own. So far there is no disagreement with the basic idea that knowledge requires the giving of a reasoned account. Knowledge of any kind worth having (i.e. not knowledge of everyday bits of information) requires that you be able to give satisfactory reasons for what you claim. What distinguishes the sceptic from other philosophers is just that he never regards himself as having got to that point. The Greek term *skeptikos* means, not a negative doubter, but an investigator, someone going in for *skeptesthai* or enquiry. As the late sceptic author Sextus Empiricus puts it, there are dogmatic philosophers, who think that they have found the truth; negative dogmatists, who feel entitled to the position that the truth cannot be found; and the

sceptics, who are unlike both the other groups in that they are not committed either way. They are still investigating things.

Why the problem? Surely if you investigate you will turn up *some* results that can count as knowledge or at least as belief. Sceptics think that, while we want to think this, it will always turn out to be *rash* assent: we committed ourselves too soon. (The Academic sceptics call it 'precipitate' assent.) Thorough enquiry and investigation will reveal that the situation was more complex and problematic; we turn out never to have reason to commit ourselves one way or the other, and so end up suspending judgement—that is, having a detached and uncommitted attitude to whatever the issue was.

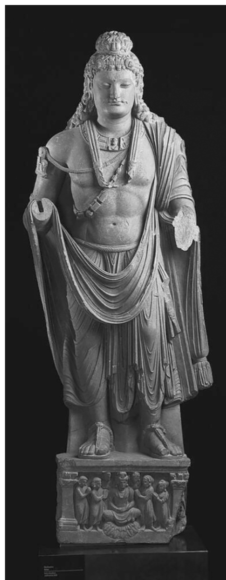
At first this sounds ridiculous, indeed unserious. Does the sceptic really hold that we can never establish what time it is, that the sun is shining, that this is bread and not grass? This is an ancient reaction, but a mistaken one.

Pyrrho, seen as the founding figure for one branch of scepticism, is someone about whom we know little, and our accounts of his intellectual attitudes are frustratingly meagre. His uncompromising attitude about our never having reason to commit ourselves to anything led to unfriendly jokes, such as that he had to be looked after by unsceptical friends to stop him walking off cliffs, and the like. But there is an alternative tradition to the effect that he lived a normal life, so it is most probable that, like later sceptics, he took it that even when we cannot commit ourselves to beliefs we can live by the way things appear to us.

Later sceptics who took their inspiration from Pyrrho developed the idea that we 'live by appearances'. That is, all we need to live is for things to *appear* to us in one way rather than another. If we go beyond this (which we get inclined to do when we move on from everyday matters to issues where there is dispute and complexity) and try to commit ourselves to beliefs, we will always in fact find,

Pyrrho

Pyrrho of Elis (*c.*360–*c.*270 BCE) was originally a painter, but at some point became a philosopher, accompanying Alexander the Great on his conquest of north-western India. There the Greek encountered 'naked wise men' (*gymnosophists*), and may have begun an encounter with early Buddhists, perhaps the Madhyamika school; analogies have been found between argument patterns in this school and some of Pyrrho's arguments. Later Greek rulers in this area became Buddhists, and the visual art of the region developed a style which fused Greek and Indian traditions (the Gandhara style, Figure 9).



9. Buddha, 2nd century CE, Pakistan. This Buddha, in Greek drapery and sandals, recalls the Greek god Apollo.

if we investigate rigorously, that we cannot commit ourselves; there turns out to be equally good reason on both sides of the question, so that we find ourselves equally inclined both ways, and so end up uncommitted, suspending judgement on the issue. This does not leave us paralysed, however, since we still have the appearances to live by. The fact that I cannot commit myself does not stop things appearing to me one way rather than another. Being rationally uncommitted does not do away with all the other sources of motivation that get us by—habit, desire, fear of the law, and so on. The view that if reason does not commit us we cannot go on living comes, according to the sceptics, from an overestimation of the powers of reason, which we do not need in practice, and which tempts the dogmatist into committing herself prematurely to the truth of some theory.

Moreover, the sceptics go on the offensive here. What we want out of rational commitment to our beliefs, they hold, is happiness, which is to be found in peace of mind; we want to feel confident about the way things are and not worried by our uncertainty about them. But commitment to positive or negative theories on the topic can never do this; all it can do is displace or redirect the original anxiety. Only the sceptic, who realizes the futility of commitment to belief, is tranquil; rigorous investigation brings suspension of belief, and this brings the peace of mind that had been sought in the wished-for answers. Hence only the sceptic gets what everyone else is looking for, peace of mind. But she gets it only by not looking for it, merely being there when it arrives; and it arrives as a result of the rigorous investigation that makes it impossible to commit yourself for or against any position.

There is much in the sceptical story that is implausible, or seems forced. Moreover, problems lurk which can be barely mentioned here. What is the scope of the sceptic's suspension of belief? Does it extend only to matters on which she investigates? If so, does she have some beliefs, namely the unproblematic ones? Anyway, what is the sceptic doing telling us all this about how to achieve peace of

mind, how others fail, and the sceptic succeeds? How can she do this without holding beliefs?

Ancient scepticism is one of the most interesting and subtle philosophical positions. Like its dogmatic cousins, it embodies strong assumptions about reason, though subversive rather than positive ones, and is both deeper and broader than modern forms of scepticism which limit themselves to complaints merely about knowledge, and may reject some subject matters on the basis of uncritically accepting others. Ancient sceptics, unlike moderns, are uninterested in carving out a position within philosophy; they think that philosophical reason, when exercised, will always undermine itself.

Socrates provided an alternative inspiration for the other branch of ancient scepticism, which took over Plato's Academy from the middle of the 3rd century BCE until its end in the 1st century BCE. The Academics held that philosophizing in the spirit of Plato should take the form of doing what Socrates did, namely undermining the claims of others while putting forward none of your own. Hence the sceptical Academics spent their time arguing *ad hominem* (i.e. not from any position of their own but only from premisses the opponent accepts) against dogmatic philosophers whose claims they thought inadequately grounded, mostly Stoics. Unlike the Pyrrhonists, the Academics made no claims about happiness or peace of mind. Their assumption about reason is simply that dogmatic philosophers have always been too hasty; their claims can be overturned from within their own positions and not by relying on the establishment of others.

Varieties of knowledge

So far we have seen bold and radical positions, both positive and negative, about knowledge and belief. It would be misleading, however, to give the impression that ancient concerns with knowledge always focus on wisdom and understanding; we can

also find concerns which overlap with modern ones. Plato, for example, produces interesting arguments against relativist theories of knowledge which do not rely on any of the special features of his own ambitious account. A relativist, such as Protagoras, against whom Plato argues in the dialogue *Theaetetus*, claims that for someone to have a true belief is no more than for something to appear true to him, and hence that truth is relative to the believer. This can seem at first like a liberating discovery, especially since it defuses all disagreement. The wind appears hot to me, cold to you; we are both right, and there is nothing to argue about. Protagoras, however, puts his relativist theory forward as a *theory*, something we should accept and take seriously (if only in order to be liberated from our disagreements). But if Protagoras is right, the truth of his own theory is relative to him—that is, it is just the way things appear to him. And why ever should we accept, or be interested in, what happens to appear a certain way to Protagoras? If we are to take relativism seriously as a theory, then relativism cannot hold of it. (Versions of this powerful point are still being made against modern forms of relativism.)

Plato is also interested in the question of what is going on when we are said to know particular facts, and this is developed by the Stoics, who retain the expertise model for what they call knowledge proper, but also develop an account of what they call apprehension, which amounts to one way of thinking of knowledge, especially in some modern epistemological theories. Apprehension is what you have when you are so related to an empirical fact that you cannot be wrong about it. The Stoics put some effort into working out what the conditions have to be for this to hold. Roughly, the thing in question has to make an impact on you, an impression; and this impression must come from the thing in the right way—the causal story must be the right one; and the impression must be one that you could not have had from any *other* thing, however similar. These conditions were seen as a challenge to produce counter-examples, where the conditions are all met, but we have to agree that we do not have knowledge.

The Academic Sceptics in particular carried on a long debate with the Stoics on this topic, as a result of which the Stoics seem to have introduced further conditions and modifications.

Finally, we do find, in the range of ancient epistemological theories, one which seems to meet the desiderata for a modern theory, namely that of Epicurus. For Epicurus does worry about scepticism in the modern sense—that is, the person who rejects the idea that our beliefs might ever meet the criteria for knowledge—and he thinks that he has to establish the possibility of knowledge against this challenge. He thinks of knowledge not in terms of the expertise model, but in terms of the knower's relation to particular matters of fact. What I know, then, are for Epicurus primarily particular pieces of information to which I am related in such a way that my relation to them constitutes knowledge; these are the primary items that are known. Anything more ambitious than this has to be shown to be built out from these primary items in the most economical and careful way that is feasible.

Epicurus' theory is rigorously empiricist—that is, it begins from and relies on our sense-experience. What I know comes to me through the senses, since only sensations relate information to me in a way which is unmediated by a process which could involve error. My ordinary beliefs, arrived at in ways which involve inferences going beyond experience, contain truths, but also falsehoods that have crept in through the human propensity to get things wrong. But if I concentrate only on what the senses tell me, I cannot go wrong. For Epicurus, belief and reasoning are sources of error, not, as for most other schools, the source of our ability to correct error. Error, then, comes in only when I start adding beliefs to what the senses tell me. Hence it turns out that what the senses tell me is not even as extensive as claims about tables and towers—since obviously these can be mistaken, as when we judge from a distance that a square tower is round. Rather, the reports of the senses are limited to how the tower appears to us from a

particular perspective at a particular place, and so on. Hence we have knowledge, since we cannot be wrong about this. We could, however, be wrong about the tower, since we might make a claim that did not make due allowance for perspective, distance, etc. Our knowledge turns out to be far more limited than our everyday observations about the world around us.

Epicurus' theory of knowledge was not regarded as particularly impressive; indeed it was widely regarded as hideously crude. Later Epicureans, however, did develop interesting analogues of what we think of as issues of induction—how, from a number of particular observations, we can come to make justifiable generalizations about *all* occurrences of this kind of thing. Are we justified, for example ('we' being Epicurean philosophers living in Italy) in inferring that because all the humans we have observed are mortal, so are humans in hitherto undiscovered countries, such as Britain? (*If* there are any humans there, adds Philodemus, the philosopher whose example this is.)

Empiricist theories of knowledge, like an emphasis on the knower's relation to particular facts, are the minority stream in ancient epistemology. What emerges from even a cursory survey of ancient concerns with knowledge, however, is the breadth and diversity of approaches. A student of epistemology in the ancient world would find a number of challenging theories and an extensive tradition of debate. She would find several ways of understanding *knowledge*: theories about wisdom and theories about apprehension of particular facts, theories privileging abstract reasoning and theories privileging the basic reports of the senses. She would also find extensive engagement not just with knowledge, but more generally with problems of belief and the powers of reasoning, both positive and negative.

Chapter 4
Logic and reality

The syllabus

If you specialize in philosophy at university, you discover that there are some skills you have to acquire, and topics you have to cover, in order to become competent in the subject. You will have to do some courses in logic and critical thinking, and cover topics in metaphysics, epistemology, and (possibly) philosophy of science, and in ethics, political philosophy, and (possibly) aesthetics. You may also have to do some history of philosophy, which will almost certainly be done in a way critical of philosophers, past and present, in what are seen as 'other' traditions, although philosophers in what is seen as 'your' tradition will be treated more respectfully.

In the ancient world things were not so different. After the establishment of Plato's Academy, philosophical schools devoted to different philosophical traditions were the major places where philosophy was learnt, taught, and passed on. Wealthy individuals might have philosophy tutors in their homes, but these would typically have been trained in some philosophical school. Each school would belong to a definite tradition, within which certain texts (typically Aristotle's or the Stoics') were privileged. And from early on the philosophical curriculum consisted of three parts: logic, physics, and ethics. This happened early enough for it to be

ascribed (unconvincingly) to Plato, though it is clear that neither Plato nor Aristotle wrote with such a curriculum in mind; it fits the interests of later schools, like the Stoics and Epicureans, far better. So far, we have looked at an important topic in the ethics part of the curriculum, and also at theory of knowledge, which was considered part of logic, since logic was construed broadly, so as to cover what we call epistemology and philosophy of language. But there was also logic as we generally understand the term, more narrowly. And there is the topic that sounds oddest to us, 'physics'.

Logic

Why is logic needed as part of philosophy? This topic was controversial then as now, some holding that logic was a part of philosophy in its own right, others that it was a 'tool' that we use in order to improve our study of philosophy proper. Either way, we need logic to ensure that our arguments are sound ones, with no lurking fallacies for opponents to exploit, and also to enable us to detect weaknesses in the ways our opponents argue. In ancient philosophy logic has the function of sustaining philosophical truths and demolishing philosophical mistakes. Logic developed for its own sake was often regarded as a potential distraction from the central concerns of philosophy.

Logic is one of Aristotle's more impressive achievements. Finding no given systematic techniques for classifying and distinguishing arguments that just persuade people from arguments which lead to true conclusions by valid inferences (and also finding, as today, many influential people glorying in conflating the two), Aristotle systematized the notion of valid argument and constructed an extensive logical system.

The centre of Aristotle's logic is the idea of a *deduction*, in Greek *sullogismos*. He defines it quite generally: a deduction is an

argument in which, some things having been laid down, something other than the things laid down comes about by necessity, because these things are so. More formally, the conclusion of a deduction follows necessarily from the premisses. Aristotle adds that the conclusion must be something *different* from the premisses; hence he is not trying to capture what modern logicians are after when they hold that 'If p then p' is a valid argument. He also holds that the truth of the conclusion must come about in a way that is *through* the truth of the premisses, thus excluding redundant premisses making no contribution in establishing the truth of the conclusion. Here too he diverges from modern notions of purely formal inference. There has been a large amount of (unsettled) modern discussion as to what Aristotelian deductions are in terms of modern formal logic, and hence as to how his logic should be classified.

In modern terms Aristotle's is only a fragment of logic, since, despite the wide scope of his definition of a deduction, he systematically studies only a much narrower range of deductions, those that have come to be known as Aristotelian syllogisms. He considers statements, positive and negative, that have the form of claiming that a predicate *P*, 'belongs to' or does not 'belong to' a subject *S*, in all, some, or no cases. (As developed since the Middle Ages, these statements take the more familiar form of 'All *S*s are *P*', 'Some *S*s are *P*', 'Some *S*s are not *P*', and 'No *S*s are *P*'.) Aristotle's greatest contribution is the use of schematic letters, which enables him to study the form of an argument regardless of its particular content. He systematizes the ways in which two statements in one of these forms, which share a common term (the 'middle' term) lead to a conclusion. Some of these combinations will give valid arguments, others not.

Aristotle devotes great ingenuity to showing which forms are valid, and which are not. (He also begins to develop a system of 'modal logic', i.e. a logic of statements modified by 'necessarily', 'possibly', and so on, but less successfully.)

Various suggestions have been made as to why Aristotle should have limited himself in this way. Fairly plausible is the idea that, although he is interested in arguments as such, Aristotle is most concerned to formalize the type of argument which finds its home in his model of a completed science or body of knowledge, one in which what is at stake is the relations of *kinds* of thing, and claims about what holds universally are particularly important. Arguments involving individuals find no place in this logical system (though they appear in fleeting thoughts on Aristotle's part about a 'practical' logic of arguments that lead to action).

Aristotle hints at ideas, developed further by his pupil Theophrastus, of systematizing arguments where what is studied are the relations between statements, rather than the terms which form part of them. Real progress here, however, was left to the Stoics, in particular Chrysippus. Stoic logic concerns statements or *axiomata*, which assert or deny something. Compound statements are produced by joining simple statements by various connectives, such as 'and', 'or', and 'if'. Stoic logic studies arguments which are made up of premisses and conclusion, where these are all statements; much of it overlaps with modern 'propositional logic', though there are differences. Five argument schemata are taken as basic (the schematic letters *P* and *Q* stand in for statements). These are: (1) If *P*, then *Q*, *P*; therefore, Q (still familiar, as 'modus ponens'), (2) If *P*, then *Q*, not-*Q*; therefore not-*P* ('modus tollens'), (3) Not both *P* and *Q*, *P*; therefore not-*Q*, (4) Either *P* or *Q*, *P*; therefore, not-*Q*, (5) Either *P* or *Q*, not-*P*, therefore *Q*. From this basis Stoic logic developed in sophisticated and powerful ways.

As with Aristotle, the Stoics were not merely interested in argument for its own sake. They were concerned to produce arguments which were also 'proofs'—arguments which, as they put it, 'by way of agreed premisses, reveal by deduction an unclear conclusion' (i.e. a conclusion which was previously unclear, but which the argument reveals). Logical form is studied in the service

of representing our claims to knowledge, in this case the way we claim to reach knowledge of ‘unclear’ or theoretical matters by way of what we can agree on in our experience.

Epicurus and his school affected to despise formal logic as a trivial waste of time. But they also spent energy on studying what were called ‘signs’ on the basis of which we make inferences from what we experience to matters that are beyond our own experience; so they engaged other schools in discussion about logic to some extent.

Students of philosophy in the ancient world could (unless they were Epicureans) expect to study Aristotelian or Stoic logic. There were disputes as to which was the more important; we do not find attempts to combine them in a wider system, probably because there was no shared agreement as to the nature and role of logic in philosophy. By historical accident, Stoic logic was lost, along with much early Stoicism, at the end of antiquity, whereas Aristotle’s logic not only survived but became regarded simply as logic, as all that logic was. It was elaborated in the universities of western Europe in the Middle Ages and regarded as complete as late as Kant. It was dislodged from this place in the syllabus only by the rediscovery of propositional logic by Frege and Russell at the beginning of the 20th century, a development which encouraged the rediscovery by scholars of Stoic logic, now an established topic of research.

Nature and science

The third part of the philosophical curriculum, ‘physics’, no longer sounds as though it even belongs to philosophy. This is partly because of our narrowing of a term which originally meant the study of *nature* or *phusis*. Nature is just everything that there is, or the world (including humans, who are part of the world). Hence the study of nature can cover a number of very different

things, and ‘physics’ covers a range of enquiries which for us have become segregated into different subject matters and taught in very different ways.

One type of enquiry seeks explanations for the puzzling things we see around us and are exposed to. What explains the regularities of the sun and the moon? What brings about the seasons, so crucial for farmers? Why are there hurricanes, earthquakes, eclipses? In the ancient world these were regarded as issues which were part of the study of nature as philosophers undertook that. As philosophy developed, however, and especially after Aristotle, these questions lost much of their interest, since there were numbers of theories about them, but no decisive ways of deciding between these, and so no convincing way of showing any given answer to be correct. They became regarded as suitable material for dinner-party discussion rather than live philosophical questions. In the modern world, of course, the advances of science, whatever their other drawbacks, have provided us with firm answers to questions like these. They no longer seem remotely philosophical, and ancient discussions of them are often put into the history of science.

The study of nature narrowed in another way also, especially in the period after Aristotle, with the development of bodies of scientific knowledge separate from philosophy. Medicine, though crude by modern standards, developed as a specialized science, with differing schools. It was the mathematical sciences, however, which made the greatest strides, with Euclid’s *Elements* a high point. Archimedes was not only a great mathematician, but developed astronomy and also applied branches like engineering. Historians of science sometimes lament the fact that sophisticated technical ideas were developed in places like Alexandria, but then applied only in ways that we find trivial and disappointing. Heron of Alexandria, for example, describes a machine for making figures mechanically pour libations on an altar. However, basic facts about

the ancient economies precluded anything like the development of our industrial technology. Whether we are obviously the winners here is another matter.

Physics and metaphysics

The study of nature, or 'physics' in the ancient sense, however, covered more than issues which later became narrow scientific enquiries. From the beginning, 'nature' could be used for 'what there is', everything that there is to be studied. Hence much of ancient 'physics' is so broad as to correspond to what we think of as metaphysics. Is change a necessary feature of our world? What is change, anyway? In the world around us, what are the real entities, the things that are basic to a true view of the way the world *really* is? Are living things, like animals and humans, such basic entities? Living things seem to be the subjects of changes, the things changes happen to. But if what is real is the subject of change, then perhaps in looking for what is real we should not stop with the living things, but look for whatever it is which in *them* is the subject of change. Perhaps this is the material they are made out of? Issues like this are central to the philosophical enquiries of many of the so-called Presocratics and of Aristotle, who engaged with their ideas and is our major source for many of them. They are not part of modern science, but of more abstract philosophical enquiries, generally called metaphysical. Often the dividing line between Aristotle's 'physics' and his 'metaphysics' is a blurry one.

Questions like these were thought to arise naturally in the context of a general view of the world as a whole. Given the less ambitious scope of modern metaphysics, they are often studied in relative isolation. We tend to see Plato's 'theory of Forms', for example, as a metaphysical theory that has nothing to do with what we think of as physics or the study of nature. In the ancient world, however, it was mostly seen as one aspect of Plato's 'physics' or theory of the world, and was primarily studied in the *Timaeus*, a dialogue

which contains Plato's cosmology or account of the universe and its structure. In the *Timaeus* the 'Forms' are present, but they have a role different from the one they have in dialogues like *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, where they are the culmination of individuals' passionate intellectual searching (see p. 72). They have an important role in Plato's cosmology, but now the object of intellectual enquiry is the formal structure of the entire universe, of which our world is only a puny part. Studying the nature of 'Forms' is no longer a culmination of intellectual search; it's an important part of the whole enquiry into the cosmos, but only part.

What you studied as 'physics' or metaphysics in the ancient world would depend a great deal on what tradition of philosophy you primarily belonged to. Epicureans, for example, held that physical and metaphysical questions should matter to us only to the extent that the wrong answers posit the gods, or other divine forces, as responsible for aspects of nature that we find puzzling or problematic. This belief, however, leads us to be anxious and unhappy. For Epicurus, securely getting rid of this anxiety was our only reason for studying questions about nature.

Getting interested in them for their own sake was a misuse of time that would be better employed learning more directly how to live well. The Stoics thought it important to be right about the major metaphysical points about the world: it is governed by providence, and a rational appreciation of it will discern how everything in it is for the best. But they were not much more interested than the Epicureans in getting the details right for their own sake.

Aristotle on nature

Among ancient philosophies it is the Aristotelian tradition which has the broadest and most generous conception of what the study of nature is. Aristotle had the reputation of being the philosopher most interested in causes and explanations. And, although his account of nature is not one that we, with our modern scientific

knowledge, can still accept, we can still appreciate the main lines of it as embodying a response to our world which is highly worthy of respect.

In the dialogue *Parmenides* Plato shows that he is aware of problems in what he has said about Forms. There are arguments which appear to threaten the existence of such things as Forms;

Plato's 'theory of Forms'

Plato has no explicit theory of Forms. In some dialogues, especially *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus*, there are passages, some with argument and others more expressive and metaphorical, which introduce in various ways items we usually call Forms, but for which Plato never develops a standard terminology.

In contrast to the things in our experience which are beautiful, Plato introduces the idea of the 'beautiful itself', which is beautiful in a way not relative to context or time or perspective. Unlike all the beautiful things and people in our experience, the beautiful itself is never not beautiful. This idea is developed with value terms like *beautiful*, *just*, and *good*, and with mathematical terms like *double* and *half*. It is notoriously unclear how Plato's arguments could be extended beyond terms with opposites. Despite a widely misinterpreted passage in the *Republic*, Plato does not think that there is a Form for every general term. There is a Form only where there is an objective nature that can be known by being intellectually grasped; Forms are always associated with using your mind to reason, as opposed to relying uncritically on your sense-experience. The most famous passages about Forms stress this contrast between the mindless assumption that what experience impresses on you is just what there is, and the critical use of reason to grasp realities, the Forms, that are accessible only to the enquiring mind.

however, we need to posit Forms for us to have determinate objects of thought. As with the shorter Socratic dialogues, the right response is not to accept one or the other side, but to look for new resources to further enquiry into the issue. Plato continues in this spirit; he never produces a definitive 'theory of Forms' that covers all his claims about Forms, but this is plausibly because he comes to think that he does not need to; Forms figure in his writings in a number of roles, quite different but always explanatory, always appropriate to the context.

For Aristotle, nature is the world made up of things that have natures. What is it to have a nature? It is to be a thing which has a source internal to itself of changing and being changed. We can understand what a lion is only by looking at lions themselves and at the way they interact with their environment and other species. To understand an artefact like a shield, by contrast, we have to appeal to something external to the shield itself—the design of the human that made it. Things with natures are primarily living things, such as plants and animals, including humans. For Aristotle, then, nature is, right from the start, not just whatever happens, the undifferentiated totality of what there is (as it is for Mill and others from the 19th century on). Nature is already a world of things that organize themselves and live characteristic lives, and to understand nature is to come to understand what kind of lives these are. Nature is active, a system of living and changing things. There is no hint in Aristotle of the view, notorious in many scientists since the early modern period, that nature is passive, lying out there to be mastered by the scientific mind.

Still less is there the even more notorious idea that nature is there for us to exploit. For Aristotle, nature is there for us to learn from: skill and expertise take further what nature has begun. He is thinking of farmers who breed grasses to produce food crops, and of cooking as a process of pre-digestion to enable us to consume otherwise inedible foods. It never occurs to him to think of technology as hostile to nature. (Doubtless this is partly because

he is not aware of any technology sophisticated enough to do this.) Nor does it occur to him that human activities might upset nature's established balances. Humans hunt and eat animals and fish in the way these hunt one another and eat plants; it is all part of a self-regulating system. Many of Aristotle's ideas are, tragically, bound to sound quaint in our world, where humans have intervened disastrously in the workings of nature, wrecking ecosystems and exterminating species. For Aristotle the species, including humans, have always been there and always will be; what we want is to understand how they all fit in overall. This is why, in a famous passage, he defends the study of the 'lower' animals and their workings as being a human study which is as valuable as the grander study of the heavenly bodies. 'For in all natural things there is something wonderful.'

For Aristotle, we want to understand nature, including ourselves as parts of nature, because it is natural for humans to want to understand things. Isn't this circular, though? Yes, but the circularity does not matter. Aristotle's theories are naturalistic in the modern sense; they accept that the processes by which we come to understand nature are themselves a part of nature. They are not something mysteriously exempt from the conditions they study. Philosophy, including the study of nature, begins in wonder; we are puzzled and interested by what we find around us, and do not feel satisfied until we have adequate explanations for it. The search for explanation thus does not point beyond itself to finding out what nature can do for us; for Aristotle it would be beside the point, as well as foolish, for us to try to understand nature in order to exploit it for our own ends. Rather, we start to philosophize about nature because of 'wonder', the feeling of awe when we see how amazing natural beings and their processes are. We go on to feel puzzled, and to seek explanations in our own case in the same way as happens with other living and non-living things.

Explaining is finding out *why* things are as they are, and for Aristotle there are four basic ways of doing this, his so-called

‘four causes’, which appeal to what he calls form, matter, the moving cause, and the final cause, what the thing is for.

Teleology without design

Aristotle is aware that his demand for teleological explanations, explanations in terms of final causes or what something is for, is contentious. He knows of previous thinkers who held that there are no goals in nature, and that we and the world around us are the contingent products of random events. Animals’ teeth, for example, were held by some to be the product of random combinations of material, some of which turned out to be suited to animals’ needs while others were not.

Aristotle, as often, does not think that this story is *completely* wrong; we do need the right kind of physical embodiment. But on its own it is inadequate to explain why we *always* (or nearly always) find that animals are well adapted to the lives they lead, and that their parts are formed in a way which performs the appropriate function. Teeth, for example: we find the sharp incisors at the front of the mouth, for tearing, and the blunt molars at the back, for chewing. We always find this, because it is a good arrangement for the animal. Unless something has gone wrong, we don’t find animals struggling with bad arrangements (molars at the front, for example). Random happenings, Aristotle thinks, are quite inadequate as an explanation of how we get to the universal well-adaptedness to environments and lifestyles that we find among animals. Thus, he concludes, our explanations have to include what the thing is for—the final cause. Aristotle does not think that this is always appropriate: there is nothing, for example, that horses or camels are for. The level of explanation that concerns him is that of the parts of animals. The heart, for example, processes food into blood, the form of nutriment that the rest of the body needs.

Aristotle’s is an especially interesting position, because we can now appreciate both that he is wrong, and that at the time he had

Aristotle's 'four causes'

Aristotle insists, against what he sees as the narrowness of previous philosophers, that there are four 'causes' which the enquirer into nature should make use of. What he has in mind is the different ways in which we explain natural processes and things, and he is insisting that there is not just one type of explanation, but many, which do not exclude one another. Aristotle's theory, though, is about the way the world is and not just the way we explain it; the four so-called 'causes' are different kinds of item which figure in what he thinks are the four fundamental types of explanation of nature.

One is the material cause or matter, the physical make-up of the thing, which puts considerable restrictions on what it can be and do. The second is the form. Aristotle gives examples of artefacts where the form is the shape, but in the case of a living thing the form is more complex: it is, very roughly, the way of being alive which defines that kind of thing. The form of an oak tree is whatever it is which explains why the tree lives and grows *as an oak*—from acorns, for example, and only in certain climates. Thirdly is the moving cause, the item initiating a change. Fourthly is the final cause or end, what the thing or process is for, something that has to be cited in showing how it functions.

Modern theories of causality have very different aims and assumptions, and would count only Aristotle's moving cause as a cause (and only with qualifications).

the better of the argument about the functions of animals' parts. In the absence of any plausible mechanism for getting to (almost) universal well-adaptedness from random happenings, as well as the absence of any idea of geological time, Aristotle is right in thinking that present well-adaptedness cannot be accounted for merely by random happenings. After Darwin's work, we can see why we are not compelled to an Aristotelian view.

Aristotle's teleological approach is the source of some of his most sympathetic insights. In plants, he comments, the roots have the function that the head has in animals; but we should not think of plants as growing upside down, since what is up and what down depends on the kind of thing we are talking about. Crabs are the only animals which move sideways; but in a sense they are moving forwards, since their eyes are so positioned that they can see where they are going. In these and many other cases Aristotle frees himself from human ways of thinking of things like nutrition and movement to observe how well the species functions from its own point of view.

Aristotle's thoughts about teleology have nothing to do with the idea that purposes in nature are the product of design—indeed, for him this would be inappropriate projection of human concerns onto nature, shaping nature in our image in an absurdly pretentious way.

However, Aristotle's was not the only version of teleology available in the ancient world.

Teleology with design

In his dialogue *Timaeus*, Plato presents an account of the universe as created by God, who is a craftsman and who produces our universe in the way that a craft worker creates an artefact, by imposing form and order on materials which are more or less satisfactory for the task. Plato holds that the materials available to God for making the world are inherently unsatisfactory and perhaps even refractory, since our world is created to a good plan, but contains failure and evil.

It is uncertain, and was much discussed in the ancient world, whether Plato had in mind an actual creation or was merely giving an analysis of the ways things are, but certainly the overall picture is one in which our world is not only created, but created to carry

out an intellectual design on the part of a creator. Moreover, not merely the general principles of cosmology, but some quite specific details, particularly concerning humans, are explained in terms of overall design. The fact that humans walk upright, and have roughly spherical heads, is explained by reference to our being rational in a way that other animals are not; the explanations (in the absence of the overarching theory) are bound to seem extremely fanciful.

The *Timaeus*, however, presents itself not as dogmatic cosmology but merely as a 'likely story', an example of the kind of account that Plato thinks is the right one to give; it is poetic and grandiose in style. And the account it gives is also very openly 'top-down', working through the consequences of a few very general principles; Plato shows no interest in satisfying the observations we make in our experience, or in making any himself.

The Stoics picked up on Plato's account of the world as the creation of a designer God, and developed it, though in a somewhat different direction. Their conception of God is different; for them God is to be thought of not as a creator of the world, but in a more impersonal way. God is simply the rational organization of the world, and so should not be thought of as a person (though the Stoics allow that popular religion, which accepts several gods, is a dim grasp of the idea that the world is structured by reason and intelligence).

The Stoics therefore take a different tack from Plato's appeal to the idea that God is like a craftsman. They appeal to evidence in the world that suggests that it is the product of design and rational ordering. They reject the idea that the world is the product of random events and forces, on the grounds that it is implausible—like, they say, the idea that random distribution of letters of the alphabet could produce a poem. (This argument is different from Aristotle's; he denies that random events could produce regular well-adaptedness, whereas the Stoics deny that random events could produce good design.)

Some of their arguments for design in the world appeal to the sheer complexity of natural objects. Suppose, one argument goes, that a complicated mechanism like a clock were shown to people unfamiliar with it; they would still recognize it as the product of a rational being. Hence, natural objects, which display a greater complexity and suitability for their function than artefacts, must be the product of reason—clearly a reason greater than ours, one embodied in the universe as a whole. (This is strikingly similar to the 'argument from design' common among Christian thinkers before Darwin.)

Other arguments appeal to the complexity of the world's organization, seen as a huge ecosystem in which all the parts are mutually interdependent. The Stoics also appeal to the way that animals are well suited to their environments and mutual interrelations, but they are not interested in these for their own sakes, merely for the indication they give that the world is a well-organized whole.

Thinking of the world as designed, the Stoics often compare it to a house or a city, and since these are obviously designed for the sake of their inhabitants, this makes prominent the point that for the Stoics the world is rationally designed for the obvious beneficiaries, namely rational beings—that is, gods and humans. As far as humans are concerned, therefore, the rest of the world—plants and animals—is designed for our benefit. This leads the Stoics to a very anthropocentric view of the world, in which grain, olives, and vines are for us to consume, sheep for clothing us with their fleeces, oxen for pulling our ploughs, and so forth. Such a world-view is unlikely to encourage the kind of curiosity about nature's wonders that we find in Aristotle. It also leads to a purely instrumental view of animals other than humans, which are seen as convenient materials for humans to make use of and thereby make our world a more organized and rationally developed place. The contrast with the humanitarian attitude we find in Stoic thought to all humans, whatever their social roles,

is in sharp contrast; many have pointed to a comparison with Kant on this point.

No teleology!

Epicurus alone among the ancient schools denies that in nature we find any teleological explanations. Nothing in nature is *for* anything, neither the world as a whole nor anything in it.

Positively, Epicurus asserts that our world, and in the course of time infinitely many worlds, have grown up as a result of random collisions of atoms in empty space. This is, he claims, a sufficient explanation, given enough time. We have seen that given the state of other beliefs about the world in ancient culture (e.g. the absence of any indication of the real age of the world), Epicurus' position here was bound to seem weaker than it does to us, and one reason that one or other form of teleology was so common in ancient thought was just the implausibility of the alternative.

Epicurus also argues against the opposition, and here appeals to the idea that an unbiased view of our world does not make it look like the product of design, or at any rate of a very good design. Most of the world is not habitable by humans, for example; human attempts to survive are constantly threatened by the unpredictability of natural factors (droughts, hurricanes, and so on) and by hostile environments and other species that render human life a struggle. Humans, with their helpless babyhood and lack of natural weapons, do not seem particularly well adapted to compete for survival with other species. And so on.

Epicurus' arguments are effective only against the view that the world was providentially designed for the benefit of humans. Even so, there are responses: perhaps the problems humans encounter are due to the fact that rational design in the universe has only inferior materials to order. And Epicurus never really meets the point that with no appeal to any kind of purpose in

nature he has a hard time explaining how random collisions of atoms result in the *regular* well-adaptedness of species to their environments.

Ancient theories and the modern world

The legacy of these ancient disputes became greatly simplified. Already in the ancient world both Jews and Christians found Plato's *Timaeus* acceptable as a philosophical explication of the creation story in Genesis. This is not surprising, since the Judaeo-Christian God is the creator of the world, and designed it so as to be good. Moreover, humans have a privileged place in it. In the Middle Ages the view that prevailed was the design view: everything in the world, including us (indeed especially us) was created to fulfil its place in the world, which is to be found in God's design for it. Humans are not only the special beneficiaries of this plan; the rest of creation is designed for us to put to our use and be the masters of, since humans (in sharp contrast to any ancient view) are made to be the masters and exploiters of the creation.

In the Middle Ages, when Aristotle's views were rediscovered, they were fitted into the design view, since they were aligned with a theological framework in which the world is the creation of a designer God. Aristotle's own more subtle position was not appreciated; the only alternatives were seen as being that the world is the result of divine design or that it is the product of mere random happenings. The latter view was not taken seriously until the Renaissance, when Epicurus' views again became influential and inspired some philosophers to reject the entire medieval world-view.

This world-view included, and indeed had itself largely come to be formed by, the philosophy of Aristotle. But that itself had become greatly altered in the process. Aristotle's view of nature, including his ideas about ends in nature, had become part of a large

theological system. This happened in all three theistic traditions, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic. The Islamic tradition was earlier than western European philosophers in translating and developing the ideas of Aristotle, together with late Platonism; by the end of the Middle Ages scholars in all three traditions had developed highly sophisticated conversations with Aristotle and with one another, especially with Islamic and Christian interpretations of Aristotle's metaphysics.

In this process, Aristotle's own tentative and cooperative methodology was forgotten as his ideas were hardened into a system, increasingly seen as a complete and all-inclusive system, with answers to everything. The medieval poet Dante calls Aristotle 'the master of those who know'—the great know-it-all, something very different in spirit from Aristotle's own enquiry in a spirit of curiosity and wonder.

The new learning of the Renaissance replaced the system of Aristotelianism, but because this had become deeply entrenched in the universities it hung on for surprisingly long, and became associated with self-protective and reactionary rejection of new kinds of thinking. A similar phenomenon happened with Aristotle's ethical and political thought, which was later elevated to a central place by the Roman Catholic Church. This rigidification of Aristotle's thinking has led to equally unsubtle rejections of his ideas, and to refusal to engage with them in detail. In periods when Aristotle was regarded as The Great Authority, intelligent thinkers have often rejected that authority, while Aristotle's own attitude has been lost. Because Aristotle's own works are quite difficult to read, hostile attitudes to his ideas get passed on from book to book, and get accepted by people who have never actually engaged with him as a philosopher. Even today, it is quite common to find hostility to Aristotle on the part of people who have never read more than a few quotations pulled out of context and who think of him simply as an authority to be rejected.

Aristotle and authority

'The investigation of the truth is in one way hard, in another easy. An indication of this is found in the fact that no one is able to attain the truth adequately, while, on the other hand, no one fails entirely, but every one says something true about the nature of things, and while individually they contribute little or nothing to the truth, by the union of all a considerable amount is amassed. Therefore, since the truth seems to be like the proverbial barn door, which no one can fail to hit, in this way it is easy, but the fact that we can have a whole truth and not the particular part we aim at shows the difficulty of it

...It is only fair that we should be grateful, not only to those whose opinions we may share, but also to those who have expressed more superficial views; for these also contributed something, by developing before us the powers of thought.'

Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 2, chapter 1

'When a Schoolman tells me *Aristotle hath said it*, all I conceive he means by it, is to dispose me to embrace his opinion with the deference and submission which custom has annexed to that name. And this effect may be so instantly produced in the minds of those who are accustomed to resign their judgement to the authority of that philosopher, as it is impossible any idea either of his person, writings or reputation should go before. So close and immediate a connexion may custom establish, betwixt the very word *Aristotle* and the motions of assent and reverence in the minds of some men.'

Bishop George Berkeley

This is an extreme example of the way in which ideas from ancient philosophy can get used and reconfigured by subsequent traditions, in a way which pulls them out of their original context of argument. Sometimes this can be invigorating, and produce a

new and fruitful engagement, as happened with Aristotle for much of the Middle Ages. But if the interpretative tradition goes on too long (especially without serious competition) and gets too rigid and institutionalized, the result can become stultifying, and can end with hostile unthinking rejection. And this makes it harder to get back to the original and engage with it from our own perspective.

Chapter 5
When did it all begin? (And what is it anyway?)

Many people have turned expectantly to the beginnings of Greek philosophy, only to find that the first philosopher they meet, Thales in the 6th century BCE, held, apparently, that 'everything is water'. Anyone teaching ancient philosophy has to cope with the bafflement that this discovery tends to produce. It is an odd beginning to a philosophical tradition. Yet *something* happens in the 6th century, later to acquire the name *philosophia* or love of wisdom, which we can recognize as philosophical. What exactly is it?

It is in keeping with what we have seen of the varied and disputatious nature of ancient philosophy that this question is quite hard to answer. There is little that non-trivially unites philosophers from Thales to the end of antiquity. There is a tradition, but it is a mixed and contested one.

In view of the subsequent great cultural prestige of Greek philosophy, it has at times been resented, and sometimes groups that have felt themselves culturally marginalized by it have claimed that Greek philosophy is nothing new at all, but just a tradition taken over without acknowledgement—usually, it is claimed, from the group in question. This began with early Church fathers, who held that the pagan philosophers stole their ideas from the Jewish scriptures.

The Greeks themselves did not think that philosophy was original with them; they thought of it as coming from a variety of sources outside Greece, usually Eastern. But then, they did not value originality as such very highly, and they certainly did think that philosophy was something that they did well, and that doing philosophy was something distinctively Greek.

Differing views on the Greeks' originality

'What provokes admiration is the mental vigour and independence with which these people sought after coherent systems and did not shrink from following their lines of thought to astonishing conclusions. It may well be that contact with oriental cosmology and theology helped to liberate their imagination; it certainly gave them many suggestive ideas. But they taught themselves to reason. Philosophy as we understand it is a Greek idea.'

Martin West, 1986

'What is Plato but Moses writing in Greek?'

Numenius of Apamea (2nd century CE).

'We should not be surprised to say that the Greeks are capable of filching the beliefs of the Jews, given that they have not only plundered their other sciences from the Egyptians and Chaldaeans and other foreign nations, but even now can be caught robbing one another of their literary reputations…

It is reasonable to think that the Greeks, who contributed nothing of their own in wisdom (only verbal facility and fluency) and filched everything from foreigners, should also have been aware of the sayings of the Jews and laid hands on these in turn.

…Not just my words but their own establish them as thieves…'

Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea (*c*.260–339 CE)

(Romans recognized this, though reluctantly; Cicero and Seneca are unusual in choosing to write philosophy in Latin.) And indeed, when we read the fragments even of an author whose work is as elusive as that of Thales, we can see an interesting and distinctive way of thinking emerging.

A tradition of reasoning?

What makes it philosophical? Often, this is characterized as explicit appeal to *reason* and *argument*. Stated as generally as this, the claim is undoubtedly true. Philosophers are distinguished by arguing for their conclusions and against other philosophers' conclusions, and by demanding reasons for others' claims and giving reasons for their own. But while this may mark philosophy off from poetry and the like, it does not give us a very determinate way of proceeding, or of marking philosophy off from other intellectual endeavours. There are many kinds of reason and argument—which is to count? When we look at the different kinds of project that the Presocratics produced, we are hard put to find a single kind of reasoning at work, or a demand for a single kind of argument.

The first Presocratics, Thales, Anaximander (Figure 10), and Anaximenes—from Miletus in Asia Minor—were concerned to provide cosmologies, accounts of the universe and its workings which were reasoned, explanatory accounts of the world we live in. As Aristotle acutely saw, they focused on what he called the material cause—the question of what our world is composed of. This is the question to which we find answers in terms of water, air, and 'the boundless'. These answers show a very striking degree of simplicity and economy, and as they are articulated they provide explanations of a wide variety of puzzling physical phenomena. Because of this, these philosophers have at times been seen as precursors of science, with its explanatory hypotheses. It is clear, however, that there is little in these very speculative theories that can be usefully compared with any



10. A late representation of Anaximander with a sundial he is credited with inventing.

precise concept of scientific enquiry. A just account has to see these Presocratic figures as transitional, with an intellectual impulse to render our world explicable which has much in common with later philosophy and science.

Other Presocratics are far from scientific. Heraclitus of Ephesus writes in aphorisms of notorious obscurity which unite an account of the world as fire with concern for self-knowledge. His account of both of these appeals to reason (*logos*)—your individual reason

and the big Reason in the universe that your reason should try to conform to. There is little reason or argument in Heraclitus' aphorisms to convince us of this. Xenophanes of Colophon, however, uses reason and argument very explicitly to undermine naive beliefs about the gods. In him we see clearly for the first time reason being used to fault and replace ordinary beliefs by something the philosopher argues to be more rationally adequate. Anthropomorphic views of God are shown to be defective in a convincing way: every people, Xenophanes says, makes gods in their own image (and so would animals, if they could). However, his allegedly more rationally adequate conception of God is so strange—God seems to be a kind of sphere—that the issue is bound to arise: what is the authority of the reasoning that overthrows our beliefs and gets us to this point?

This question arises extremely sharply for Parmenides and Zeno of Elea, authors of some of the most notorious arguments in antiquity. Parmenides produced an abstract argument to a conclusion that nobody could accept: namely, that there is really only one object we can think of or refer to, which cannot without absurdity be said to be pluralized, qualified, or divided. Thus our experience of a varied and changing plurality of objects is totally misleading. Zeno produced many arguments reducing to absurdity our everyday assumptions about plurality and change. The problem here is that the arguments are hard to fault, but the conclusions cannot be accepted. This creates a discomfort about reasoned argument: what do we do when its results conflict with our beliefs?

Responses to this differ. Some thinkers continue to produce big explanatory theories of the world, simply taking on board the point that their theories undermine commonsense beliefs. Anaxagoras of Clazomenae tells us that 'the Greeks are mistaken' in saying that things come into and go out of existence; in terms of his theory anything that emerges into our experience was there already. Similarly Empedocles of Acragas and the Atomists

A new way of thinking?

'My aim has been to show that a new thing came into the world with the early Ionian teachers—the thing we call science . . . It is quite wrong to look for the origins of Ionian science in mythological ideas of any kind . . . It is to these men we owe the conception of an exact science which should ultimately take in the whole world as its object.'

John Burnet, 1892

'I have tried to show how the philosopher retains his prophetic character. He relies for his vision of divinity and of the real nature of things on the assumed identity of his own reason with a portion of the cosmic consciousness . . . The intuitive reason replaces that supernormal faculty which had formerly been active in dreams and prophetic visions; the supernatural becomes the metaphysical . . . It would have been a miracle if the wise men of the sixth century . . . should have swept their minds clean of all mythical preconceptions.'

Francis Cornford, 1952

Leucippus and Democritus of Abdera produce theories which revise our commonsense beliefs about reality and change in accordance with their own hypotheses. None of them doubts that their reasoning has the power to do this. None of them deals adequately with the question of how we get to their theories from the beliefs we all start with. Indeed Democritus recognizes a problem in that we get from our experience to the deliverances of reason, which then devalues our experience. In a poignant fragment, he represents the senses as complaining about the mind, which relies on them only to undermine them.

Other thinkers, however, fasten on the point that there is something suspicious about the way that philosophical reasoning

leads by arguments that you can't fault to conclusions that you can't accept. Cleverness in argument becomes seen as a technique in its own right, something that can be used to come to a variety of conclusions, depending on the sharpness of the arguer. Seen this way, there is little distinguishing philosophical reasoning from the amoral cleverness of the effective speaker in politics or the law courts.

This situation can reasonably be seen as rather a mess, and goes some way to explain why these philosophers have come to be called 'Presocratics', implying that Socrates is our crucial reference point. Whatever their individual accomplishments, they do not clearly belong within a unified tradition in which reasoning has a clear philosophical role. That begins with Socrates.

Reason and understanding

At first sight, as we have seen in Chapter 4, Socrates seems an unlikely figure to characterize the philosophical tradition. He is the perpetual amateur, who refuses to do any of the things which philosophers of his time did. Moreover, he utterly despises all these things—producing theories of the world, giving displays of oratory, winning debates—as being a pretentious waste of everybody's time. So what made him such a founding philosophical figure?

Socrates, as we have seen, argued against the views of others, showing them by their inability to withstand his arguments that they lacked understanding of what they were talking about. To have understanding of something, it emerged, you have to be able to 'give an account' of it, where this means giving reasons, and ultimately a rational account of what the subject in question is. But this will not be possible until you have rigorously asked yourself what reasons there are for the belief you hold. Thus, when you ask someone what reasons they have for what they say, you can show that they lack understanding if they have none, or have

reasons that are confused or inconsistent. But, particularly if you are good at this sort of questioning (as Socrates undoubtedly was), you will realize that the same applies to you; you may have developed views, but you cannot be said to understand them, and hence have the right to put them forward authoritatively, unless you can withstand the challenges of others by giving reasons for them.

From Socrates on, reasoned argument is the lifeblood of philosophy because it is only in the give and take of argument that we can achieve understanding of the positions we hold and want to put forward to others. (Understanding, as we have seen, is a kind of knowledge, and we can know only the truth; hence philosophy can also be characterized as the search for truth.) Hence the emphasis on reasoning and arguing that we find in all schools of philosophy. Now we find emerging a clear sense of *philosophical* reason and argument, distinguished from merely arguing others down and linked to the search for truth and understanding.

From the outside, then as now, all the arguing can seem aggressive and unattractive, and to those with no gift for philosophy it can seem pointless. (There is a story of a Roman official who summoned all the Athenian philosophers and offered conflict mediation so as to settle all their philosophical disputes once and for all, so that they could stop arguing and do something useful!) But from now on the importance in philosophy of reasoned argument lies in its crucial role for understanding. Figures who dismiss argument—like the Pythagoreans, who reverence their Master and want only to treasure his words—are always seen as philosophically marginal. And Epicurus' relative de-emphasis of philosophical argument led to criticism, by other philosophical schools, that he was not a genuine philosopher.

Philosophy as a subject

Plato has a claim to be the first philosopher to establish philosophy as a subject. He did so by taking over from Socrates

two elements: argument as crucial for understanding, and positive views on a variety of matters. Plato added three other important elements. One is *system*, a variety of ideas seen as holding together. A second is seeing philosophy as self-consciously *demarcated from other ways of thinking*. And a third is the *institutionalization* of philosophy as a subject for study.

In the ancient world Plato was seen as a pivotal figure, the first philosopher who was concerned to systematize his ideas and thus to hold views on a wide variety of topics belonging together in a mutually supportive way. It is unclear whether it is quite fair to see Plato as the pioneer here—Democritus the Atomist also had views on a range of topics but Plato is certainly the first to do it whose works we have. Later writers ascribed to Plato the honour of being the first to see philosophy as a system of ideas with three parts: logic, ethics, and physics. This is anachronistic, but it is true that Plato held positions over most of the range that later thinkers were to cover.

Plato does not tell us how his positive systematic ideas relate to the need for understanding to be grounded by argument. But he shows us clearly enough, in writing dialogues in which he is personally never a speaker (thus detaching his authority from the positions put forward), that what matters is not just having the right position, but holding it in the right way, namely understanding it on the basis of reasoned argument. For it is up to the reader to think about the positions put forward and test her own understanding of them. Plato, even where it is clear that he believes a position strongly, never puts it forward authoritatively. If the reader accepts it on Plato's authority, she is missing something crucial. It has to be tested and argued for before she can come to understand it.

Plato's legacy has been a divided one. His own school, the Academy, for most of its life took philosophizing in Plato's way to be arguing against the views of contemporaries *ad hominem*,

without commitment to a position of your own. Not till after the end of the school in Athens, in the 1st century BCE, did philosophers start to study, promote, and comment on Plato's ideas as a system. Interpretations of Plato, in every age, risk overstressing one side at the expense of the other. Contemporary interpretations and commentaries on Plato spread over a range of different methodologies: some treat Platonism as a system of ideas which Plato either developed over his lifetime, or pieced together from the first in different dialogues, while others discuss dialogues as invitations to the reader to follow the argument. Most contemporary methodologies have ancient predecessors.

It is modern rather than ancient interpreters who have stressed Plato's evident desire to establish philosophy as a *distinct* way of thinking. When he has Socrates tell us at the end of the *Republic* that there is an old quarrel between poetry (or literature more generally) and philosophy, he seems to be projecting back his own position. For one of the most striking things about Plato is the way that he is willing to use his own brilliant literary gifts to establish that philosophy is crucially about 'dialectic', sheer argument which does not rely on rhetorical or literary skill. Philosophy, he keeps insisting, is just for this reason *different* from what other people, such as orators, poets, and sophists do.

Whatever the tensions this produces in Plato's own work, one of his lessons was well learned. Later philosophy develops for itself a professional style: straightforward, transparent, relying only on the force of rational argument. Unsurprisingly, this is often unattractive to ordinary readers, and we find that a gulf appears between easier, more literary works written for the general public and 'real' philosophy, written in an uncompromisingly professional and technical way.

This gulf is also strengthened by philosophy's institutionalization. We know almost no details about the organization of Plato's

school, the Academy, though in every age philosophers have given accounts of it, sometimes on the model of their own university or college. It was something new, a *philosophical* school, to which young men like Aristotle came to study philosophy. (Unusually, Plato's school also contained two women philosophers, Axiothea of Phlius and Lastheneia of Mantinea.) Students probably learned Plato's ideas; they also learned how to argue. When, later in life, Aristotle set up his own philosophical school, this was seen by some as a hostile gesture, but it established the pattern whereby an original philosopher would set up his own school, finding pupils and disciples who would learn, further, and spread his ideas. Hence Plato's philosophy and Aristotle's philosophy came to have a history in their own schools; they became objects of study to other philosophers.

Once we get schools of philosophy—the Stoic and Epicurean schools getting established on similar principles—we can see the activity of ancient philosophers as astonishingly like the activity of modern philosophers. Although Plato, who was rich, refused to take fees for teaching, payment by pupils soon became a necessary feature of the system. Young men (and occasionally young women) would join a philosophical school as part of their education, or might have a trained philosopher as a tutor at home. They were educated to understand and appreciate important philosophical ideas, many of which were already part of their cultural heritage. In the schools, they were also trained in argument, acquiring abilities which had more practical application when they left, in politics and law, for example. Those most gifted at philosophy, and committed to it, would stay and become part of the school's permanent philosophical community. This does not sound so unlike the picture of philosophy teaching in universities today. (Or rather, in the less rigid university system that existed before grades and degrees came to be important as credentials.) This idea of philosophy as a kind of university education continued on until late in the ancient world, throughout vast political and cultural changes.

The similarity extends to many of the specific ways in which philosophy was carried on. We find philosophers writing treatises and essays, and also books of arguments against other philosophers' treatises and essays. We find commentaries on texts of past philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle. We find controversies within a school, for example as to which of two contemporaries has got Epicurus right. We also find extensive arguments against other contemporary schools. In their style and purpose many of these works are quite like modern philosophy journal articles and books. Indeed, contemporary philosophy students can find it easier to relate to works of this kind, the products of philosophical professionalism, than to Plato's dialogues, which are in form unlike any modern kind of philosophical writing.

Philosophy after Plato is, then, the ongoing history of philosophical schools (with two exceptions, to which we shall return). There is an interesting shadow side to it—a running complaint till the end of antiquity about pretend philosophers, who use philosophy's prestige to further their private agenda, whether money or reputation. The bogus philosopher, high-minded in class and money-grubbing outside it, is a stock figure of ridicule (especially in Lucian of Samosata, a philosophically educated satirical writer *c.*125–*c.*180 CE, who has many entertaining essays on philosophical and religious figures). This brings home the fact that in the ancient world philosophy was taken to offer people not only intellectual challenge but also practical help in living a better life and finding answers to the search for the meaning of life. Philosophers were expected not only to convey intellectual skills but also to provide in their own persons examples of the search for living well, and to be able to convey this. Nowadays we are more likely to seek the latter in religion, or in less intellectual pursuits. Ancient philosophers did not offer just one subject among many, but a subject that was uniquely close to the hearts of their audience. Sometimes this leads to the charge that philosophers in the Roman empire period

are no longer interested in logic and physics but only in ethics, but this is mistaken; sometimes the emphasis on ethics is heavier than it is in earlier philosophers, but philosophy is always taken to involve more than ethics alone. In this way ancient theories are unlike the contemporary self-help projects which often take ethical ideas from them.

A diverse range of schools

Although Aristotle was Plato's pupil, in some ways his is the least representative of the schools which formed after the Academy. This is because of Aristotle's own huge range of interests. He studied, furthered, or invented a wide range of subjects, from literary theory to logic, from economics to biology. The works he left behind are vast, some of them theoretical treatises and others more like records of research. In this respect Aristotle's school differs from the philosophical schools that come after him.

The Stoics' school began, as the earlier ones had, in a public place; Epicurus was unusual in holding his school in a private residence, the Garden. And Epicurus was unusual also in requiring his views to be held deferentially and memorized. But before very long the Epicurean school and its offshoots in other places were acting in very similar ways to the Stoics and other schools—arguing and counter-arguing, commenting on founding texts, generally continuing the philosophical activity of the founders. Every generation of students needs to learn afresh and understand philosophical positions for themselves, and hence even philosophical schools dedicated to teaching the thought of the founders develop philosophically in the give and take of philosophical interpretation. Moreover, with changing political and social circumstances new issues had to be dealt with and new challenges met. When the Romans became rulers of the Mediterranean, for example, Greek intellectuals acquired a new role as the educators of Roman aristocrats.

From the 1st century BCE we find an important change in that Athens, which had been sacked by the Romans in the course of a long war, ceased to be the centre of philosophy, which now spread wide over the Mediterranean in many other places. Some philosophical traditions were broken—Plato's sceptical school came to an end, and some Stoics developed a more student-friendly way of teaching their ideas. One philosopher, the former Academic Antiochus of Ascalon, took the position that the continuing debates between different schools had become a repetitive waste of time, and that it was more philosophically fruitful to bring them together in consensus. He systematized together basic ideas of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics where he could make them compatible, seeing as opponents only the Epicureans. Antiochus was an important figure for Cicero, but has since been disregarded as unoriginal. However, we can sympathize with his position. Once philosophy has formed a teaching tradition, it can well seem foolish to seek originality at all costs, and sounder to argue from and build on what are already the going positions. This is what most philosophers do today, so we should pause before turning up our noses at it.

In the late Roman republic and early empire, ancient philosophy arguably had a heyday (Figure 11). A serious student would have widespread opportunities to learn and think about the ideas of a variety of philosophical schools spread throughout the Roman empire. Philosophy was familiar and accessible to educated people throughout the empire. It has seldom been the case that so rich and varied an intellectual tradition has been so culturally widespread and so important to many people.

One new movement was Pyrrhonian scepticism, a breakaway movement from the scepticism of Plato's Academy. Our main source, Sextus Empiricus, systematized the methodology that later sceptics took to be the best reconstruction of Pyrrho's practice.



11. Philosophers discussing and arguing together.

Sextus lays out the ways in which the Pyrrhonist sceptic argues—ways which do not commit her to accepting the premisses as true or even the argument as valid, since the aim is to reach tranquillity rather than truth, and to free the opponent from what is blocking them from tranquillity. For this to be a coherent endeavour the Pyrrhonist has to put forward her premisses and arguments merely as what appear to her to be true, not what have truth, and validity, themselves; otherwise she would be 'rashly' committing herself to sources of disturbance. This, however,

disables Pyrrhonism from being a philosophical school, with teachers and learners of a curriculum that they are committed to.

In its own terms it is self-defeating for a Pyrrhonist to set up as an authority on anything, even the nature of Pyrrhonism; this would convict her of firm enough commitment to beliefs to threaten sceptical tranquillity. Hence Pyrrhonism could never coherently be an institutionalized school—one reason why we know so little about its spread and influence, although individual sceptics are recorded from time to time.

In the background of the established schools are the Cynics, deriving from the 4th-century figure Diogenes of Sinope, who set a model which was followed rather than setting up any formal institution. Cynics took their name from dogs (the ancient stereotype of shamelessness), went in for street preaching, and lived in ways which provocatively flouted social norms, the aim being to 'return to nature' by rejecting social convention. Some Cynics did teach informally, but as a philosophy it remained a way of life, attracting ascetic drop-outs. It could never be a philosophical school, since Cynics rejected reasoned argument, taking it that there is really nothing difficult to understand, since the answers to life's problems are simple once conventions are rejected.

In the 3rd century CE Plotinus (204–70) began a new philosophical movement, which we label Neoplatonism, although Plotinus, and the Neoplatonists who followed him, took themselves simply to be Platonists, defending Plato against objections to him that other schools had produced. For these philosophers, Platonism was a more elaborate system than Plato had envisaged, and in two major ways they went beyond Plato himself. Plotinus' intellectual world, which we strive to achieve by intellectual practice, is conceived as being in ongoing dynamic dependence on ever more unifying principles, rather than Plato's static mathematical principles. Further, the ultimate unifying

principle, the One, is the source of rational understanding but itself beyond rational understanding. Plato suggested something of the sort in making his intellectual system in the *Republic* depend on the Form of the Good, which is 'beyond being', but Plotinus and later Neoplatonists develop this idea with elaborate sophistication.

Late antiquity is also a period fertile in philosophy; Athens had become a university city, with imperially funded chairs in the different schools of philosophy. Gradually the range of meaningful options narrowed, a process hastened by the increasing cultural dominance of Christianity, whose intellectual development favoured later Platonism as the philosophy most akin to it.

A partial closing-down

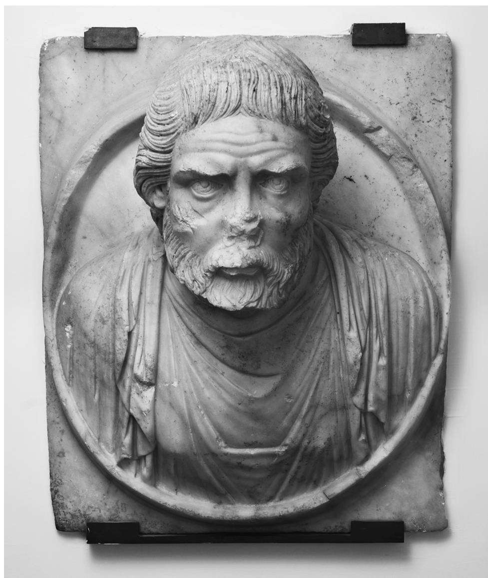
Sometimes the end of ancient philosophy, as a living tradition, is dated to 529 CE, the year in which the Christian Emperor Justinian closed the schools of pagan philosophy in Athens. Like many famous historical moments, this one crumbles somewhat under historical investigation. Athens had long ceased to be the major philosophical centre; it is not clear that any philosophical schools were functioning there other than the Platonists; Justinian did not actually close the schools, but at most seems to have forbidden pagans to teach, and the decree does not seem to have been effective. 'Pagan' philosophy was fading before 529, and trickled on to some extent afterwards. However, any definite date oversimplifies the relation of ancient 'pagan' philosophy to Christianity, which gradually became dominant and took over many of the roles of philosophy even before becoming established as the state religion of the empire. Christian thinkers were educated in the culture of their day, which included philosophy, and the Greek Christian Church fathers' work plainly shows this. Origen of Alexandria, among many others, produced metaphysical developments of Christian ideas with subtlety and scholarship. The Latin Church fathers, however, gradually lost touch with a

culture of philosophy. Boethius (*c.*480–524 CE) is one figure who still moved easily between Latin and Greek (well enough to compare discussions of the Trinity in both languages) although his political life was spent in Italy. But even earlier, Augustine (354–430 CE) developed ideas which, in their emphasis on original sin and human depravity, were to divide the western from the eastern Church as well as from previous philosophical traditions.

When the Roman empire split, the eastern, Byzantine empire retained political and cultural unity, and philosophy remained there as an intellectual study in Christianized form. The western empire fared much worse; political unity crumbled early, and only a few philosophical texts were preserved in monasteries by people who were no longer part of the tradition they contained. Even knowledge of Greek, the language of the major texts, was lost. When philosophy developed again, some of the tradition, mainly Aristotle and some Plato, became part of it, but within a different framework, that of the Roman Catholic Church. Western European philosophy was opened up to much more of Greek philosophy through works of Islamic philosophy, and to a whole range of Greek texts from Byzantine scholars, especially after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. After the Renaissance, then, it become possible in the West to read more of the ancient texts, and to read them independently of the traditions in which they had been studied for hundreds of years. Study of Aristotle, however, outside specialist discussions, still has to contend in some ways with the after-effects of the transformation of his work inside a theological tradition (Figures 12 and 13).

Ancient philosophy and philosophy today

Since its recovery, ancient philosophy has played a mostly respected and occasionally influential role in the development of philosophy in western European countries, which have seen themselves as the inheritors of the culture of the ancient Greek and Roman world, and also in philosophy in countries culturally



12. Bust of a philosopher from Aphrodisias.

influenced by western Europe, such as North America and Australia. Different parts of the hugely varied ancient tradition have been found compelling at different times. The Stoics were influential in the 18th century, relegated to specialist studies in the 19th; exactly the opposite happened to Plato. At times the idea of Great Thinkers has led to a view of 'the canon' as a parade of Great Thoughts, to the neglect of their argumentative context. The tradition has been capacious enough to give rise to a variety of differing engagements, all, for the last three centuries at least, appreciating the importance to it of reasoned argument for philosophical understanding.

There has, however, been one unfortunate result of all the stress on reason and argument. It has sometimes given rise in the 19th and 20th centuries to a simplifying tendency to see other



13. On a Christian tomb, a philosopher sits next to a praying figure.

philosophical traditions, particularly 'Eastern' ones, as radically different and 'other', characterized by lessened emphasis on argument and a greater stress on mysticism and a search for wisdom by non-rational means. This earlier led to the view that they are more primitive than the 'Western' tradition; but it has also led, by reaction, to the view that these are more profound than the 'Western' tradition, which prizes what gets seen as superficial squabbling. In the late 20th century especially, sweeping attacks were made on reason and its place in the 'Western' tradition, and ancient philosophy has often been the subject of such attacks.

Both tendencies have been unfortunate; they have led to crude contrasts which are unhelpful and in large part untrue. This holds

particularly with respect to the philosophy of India. Ancient India produced a large and wide philosophical tradition, encompassing materialism, scepticism, and empiricism as well as schools tending to mysticism and forms of idealism—a tradition which is comparable to ancient Greek and Roman philosophy in extent and variety. Yet both Westerners and many Indians have (unless they are specialists) emphasized those schools that form a contrast to Western philosophy. Students often think that 'Eastern' philosophy will be all similar and nothing like the 'Western' tradition. We have yet to reach a completely post-colonial view, which can get beyond the false contrast of 'Western rationalism' and 'Eastern mysticism' and recognize the strong affinities between some of the Indian traditions and ancient Greek and Roman traditions more familiar in the West. It has been suggested, as noted above, that there are affinities between Pyrrhonian scepticism and the Madhyamika school of North Indian Buddhism, whose founding figure is Nagarjuna, who was perhaps contemporary with Sextus Empiricus. In view of the story that Pyrrho earlier visited North India with Alexander's army, there is the possibility of historical influences on both sides, particularly given the continued Greek presence in Northern India, with continuing Greek travel to the northern Indian kingdoms, and the kinds of cultural exchange that we can see in the discussions of King Menander (Milinda) with a Buddhist monk.

I close with a view of ancient philosophy from an intellectual insider with an outsider's perspective—Lucian of Samosata, a 2nd-century CE satirical author. In his essay *The Runaways* he has Philosophy remind her father, the chief god Zeus, of the reason he sent her down to earth in the first place, namely so that humans, hitherto ignorantly and violently mismanaging their lives, would do better. First, she continues, she went on her improving way to India, to the Brahmans, then to Ethiopia, Egypt, and Babylon, and then to the wild north. Finally she went to the Greeks, which she had thought would be easy, given their

intellectual reputation. But it turned out to be harder than she expected. After a promising start, the Sophists mixed philosophy up with—well, sophistry. And then the Athenians executed Socrates! Philosophy goes on to complain about the less than wonderful time she went on to have in Greece. Most people respect her, she says, though without understanding her, and there are genuine philosophers who love and strive for truth, and this makes it worth while. But there are also pretend philosophers who aim only at money and status, and bring her into discredit, and they drive her crazy. She needs, she says, a bit of divine help to improve the situation.

In the ancient Graeco-Roman world philosophy, for better and worse, became a subject, with its own practices, texts, and institutions. Despite this it was a far more urgent matter to its practitioners and its audience than it is for us now. Philosophy was seen as a natural extension of an ordinary education, given how important it is to live well, and how important philosophy is for that. For us there is more of a tension than there was for the ancients between the idea that philosophy enables all of us to understand ourselves and the world, and the idea that it is a rigorous and intellectually demanding matter. The important role in life played by philosophy in the ancient world has mostly been taken over by religion and a variety of other interests and pursuits. But philosophy still matters, and in many ways we can still relate our concerns to those of the ancients, and find that our study of them leads naturally to direct philosophical engagement. We still have Philosophy's problem and, lacking divine help, we still have to do the work and search for the truth ourselves.

Timeline

600 BCE	550 BCE	500 BCE	450 BCE	400 BCE	350 BCE	300 BCE	250 BCE	200 BCE
Thales Xenophanes		Parmenides	Socrates Aristippus	Diogenes of Sinope (The Cynic)		Chrysippus		Arcesilaus
		Zeno of Elea	Democritus			Archimedes		Carneades
			Antisthenes	Aristotle				
Anaximander								
			Plato					
		Heraclitus		Theophrastus				
Anaximenes				Pyrrho				
Pythagoras								
		Empedocles						
				Epicurus				
		Anaxagoras						
				Zeno of Citium				

150 BCE	100 BCE	50 BCE	1 CE	50 CE	100 CE	150 CE	200 CE	250 CE
Antiochus			Seneca	Epictetus	Sextus Empiricus		Plotinus	
Cicero								

300 CE	350 CE	400 CE	450 CE	500 CE	550 CE
Augustine					

Further reading

The fragments of the Presocratics are available in the new 11-volume Loeb edition, edited by Andre Laks and Glenn W. Most, with facing Greek and English translations. Collections in English translations are Jonathan Barnes's *Early Greek Philosophy* (London, 1987), Richard McKirahan's *Philosophy before Socrates* (Indianapolis, 1994), and Robin Waterfield's *The First Philosophers* (Oxford, 2000). There has been much recent work on ethics prior to Plato: see David Wolfsdorf, *Early Greek Ethics* (Oxford, 2020).

Plato's dialogues are best read in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. J. Cooper and D. Hutchinson (Indianapolis, 1998). There are also good translations of single dialogues, with commentaries and introductions, published by Oxford (in the World's Classics series), Penguin, and Hackett. A good introduction is *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, 2nd edn, ed. David Ebrey and Richard Kraut (Cambridge, 2022).

The standard translation of Aristotle is the revised Oxford translation, to be found in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, 1984). *Aristotle: Selections*, ed. T. Irwin and G. Fine (Indianapolis, 1995) is an introductory selection. A good introduction is *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge, 1995).

The works of later Aristotelians can be found in Robert Sharples (ed.), *Peripatetic Philosophy 200 BC to AD 200*, an introduction and collection of sources in translation (Cambridge, 2010).

Stoics, Epicureans, and Sceptics can be read in B. Inwood and L. Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (Indianapolis, 1997), and also in A. A. Long and D. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge, 1987). For the later Stoics, see the collection of texts by Brad Inwood (*Later Stoicism*, Cambridge, 2022). On the Cyrenaics see Ugo Zilioli, *The Cyrenaics* (Durham, 2012). Diogenes' sayings are collected by Robin Hard, *Diogenes the Cynic: Sayings and Anecdotes* (Oxford, 2012). For Pyrrhonism see *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism*, trans. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge, 1994), and also *The Modes of Scepticism* (Cambridge, 1985) by the same authors. Sextus' longer works are translated by Richard Bett in Oxford and Cambridge volumes.

A good general introduction is Robert Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (London, 1996).

For later Platonists before Plotinus see George Boys-Stones, *Platonist Philosophy 80 BC to AD 250*, an introduction and collection of sources in translation (Cambridge, 2018), and Ryan C. Fowler, *Imperial Plato: Albinus, Maximus, Apuleius*, text and translation (Las Vegas/Zurich/Athens, 2016).

Plotinus' work is available in new translations edited by Lloyd Gerson: *Plotinus, The Enneads* (Cambridge, 2018). A good introduction is Eyjolfur K. Emilsson, *Plotinus* (London, 2017). John Dillon and Lloyd Gerson (eds), *Neoplatonic Philosophy, Introductory Readings* (Indianapolis, 2004) introduce other Neoplatonists.

An excellent introduction to the way Christianity took up ancient philosophy is George Karamanolis, *The Philosophy of Early Christianity* (Durham, 2013).

Ancient philosophy is so varied that there is no good recent history of the entire tradition by a single author.

The works listed can mostly also be accessed digitally.

An introductory reader, with texts arranged round issues rather than chronologically, is Julia Annas, *Ancient Voices of Philosophy* (Oxford, 2000).

The Encyclopaedia of Classical Philosophy, ed. Don Zeyl (Westport, Conn., 1996) has useful entries on philosophers.

The *Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (1999) and Cambridge *History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (2000) are excellent guides to their subjects and to further reading.

There are many good introductions to the various schools of thought other than Plato and Aristotle. They include James Warren, *Presocratics* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 2007), William Desmond, *Cynics* (Durham, 2008), John Sellars, *Stoicism* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 2006), Tim O'Keefe, *Epicureanism* (Durham, 2010), Harald Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 2009), Han Baltussen, *The Peripatetics* (London, 2016), Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 2008), Miira Tuominen, *The Ancient Commentators on Plato and Aristotle* (Durham, 2009).

Notes

Chapter 1: How to be happy

Xenophon's story comes from his *Memorabilia (Reminiscences of Socrates*), Book II, 1. Evidence for the sophists' ideas can be found in R. McKirahan's *Philosophy before Socrates* (Indianapolis, 1994). Ancient eudaimonist theories are set out and discussed in Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford, 1993). Aristotle's major theoretical discussion of happiness is in Book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, available in many translations. The views of Epicurus and the Stoics on happiness are best studied in Books 1–4 of Cicero's *On Moral Ends* (*De Finibus*); see the English translation by Raphael Woolf (Cambridge, 2001), and can be found in Brad Inwood and Lloyd Gerson (eds), *The Epicurus Handbook* (Indianapolis, 1994).

Chapter 2: Humans and beasts: understanding ourselves

Euripides' play is available in many modern translations. The Epictetus passages are *Discourses* I 28 and II 17; many modern translations are available. Plato's account of the divided soul can be found in Books 4 and 9 of the *Republic*, and in *Phaedrus*, especially 244–57; also in parts of *Timaeus*. Galen's comments are from his *On the doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* III 3; there is a translation in the *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum*, the collected texts and translations of Greek medical writers. The Stoic position can be studied in Brad Inwood and Lloyd Gerson, *The Stoic Handbook* (Indianapolis, 2008). For further explorations of this theme in ancient philosophy see Hendrik Lorenz, *The Beast Within* (Oxford, 2006) and Rachel Barney et al. (eds), *Plato and the Divided Self* (Cambridge, 2012).

Chapter 3: Reason, knowledge, and scepticism

On Socrates see Christopher Taylor's *Socrates* (Oxford, 1998), an excellent short introduction. Socrates' own account of the oracle is in the *Apology*. Socrates served as the symbolic figure of the ideal philosopher for most ancient schools; the Epicureans are the main exception; for them the ideal philosopher should be as serious and unironic as Epicurus. Plato's most elaborate account of knowledge is in the central books of the *Republic*; his attacks on relativism, and indications of his concern with empirical knowledge, are in the *Theaetetus*. Aristotle's discussion of the structure of a science is in the difficult *Posterior Analytics*; see also the opening chapters of Books 1 and 2 of the *Metaphysics* for his account of the development of knowledge, and *Parts of Animals*, Book 1, chapter 5, for a defence of studying widely differing kinds of subject matter.

Chapter 4: Logic and reality

For Aristotle's logic see Robin Smith's translation of the *Prior Analytics* (Indianapolis, 1989) and his chapter in the *Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes (Cambridge, 1995). There is unfortunately no good English translation of the sources for Stoic logic; see the relevant sections of Inwood and Gerson, and of Long and Sedley; also Susanne Bobzien, 'Logic: the Stoics', in K. Algra et al. (eds), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1999), 92–176. More advanced: Ada Bronowski, *The Stoics on Lekta* (Oxford, 2019).

On Hellenistic physics and metaphysics see part IV of the *Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (above). For introductions to Aristotle's metaphysics and philosophy of science see the chapters in the *Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*. There is a huge literature on Plato's 'theory of Forms': see the *Cambridge Companion to Plato* (2nd edn) (above).

Chapter 5: When did it all begin? (And what is it anyway?)

The Further Reading gives suggestions for following up the history of ancient philosophy. The quotation from Martin West is from 'Early Greek Philosophy' in *The Oxford History of Greece and the Hellenistic World* (Oxford, 1986). The comment that Plato is just Moses in Greek

is fragment 8 of Numenius, a 2nd-century Platonist who tended to see all Great Ideas in different cultures as being the same. Eusebius, in X 1 and XI 1 of his *Preparation for the Gospel*, claims more strongly that Greek philosophy steals all its ideas from the Jewish scriptures. The contrasting quotations about the nature of the beginnings of Greek philosophy are from John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London, 1892), pp. v, 13, 28, and from Francis Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae: A Study of the Origins of Greek Philosophical Thought* (Cambridge, 1952), pp. 154–5.

Index

Note: Figures and boxes are indicated by an italic '*f*' and '*b*' following the page number.

For the benefit of digital users, indexed terms that span two pages (e.g., 52–53) may, on occasion, appear on only one of those pages.

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

I

J

K

L